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O’Dwyer’s is published monthly for $60.00 a year ($7.00 for a single issue) by the J.R. O’Dwyer Co., Inc., 271 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016. (212) 679-2471; fax: (212) 683-2750. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to O’Dwyer’s, 271 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016. O’Dwyer’s PR Report ISSN: 1931-8316. Published monthly.
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Drop the ‘socially conscious’ brand act

We all know the drill. Consumers today are more attuned to their purchasing habits and how they impact the world, and expect brands to take a stand on social and political issues with clearly-defined values that align with their own.

In recent years, we’ve witnessed the rise of the socially-conscious brand, of companies reshaping their reputations through random acts of kindness and tossing their hats in the ring on any number of hot-button social issues in a bid to position themselves as authorities on everything from climate change to racial injustice to sexual harassment. Unfortunately, too many of these efforts are disingenuous, and it’s only a matter of time until consumers grow cynical about this overplayed strategy and begin getting the sneaking suspicion that many of these initiatives are empty advocacy platitudes, consumer marketing efforts disguised as corporate benevolence. The fifteen minutes are just about up.

An unpopular opinion, I’ll admit. But one issue isn’t up for debate: Americans want corporations to be socially aware, and the public’s perception of brands is now greatly determined by companies’ commitment to causes we believe in. A March Hotwire survey found that nine out of 10 consumers consider themselves conscious of how their personal values align with their purchasing habits, and 76 percent said they now make a concerted effort to buy products and services only from companies whose beliefs are in line with their own.

Another similar recent survey discovered that 71 percent of U.S. shoppers think it’s important for businesses to take a stance on social causes, with three-quarters claiming they’re more inclined to buy from companies that support issues they agree with. The same study also found that some social stances now influence consumers’ buying decisions more than price: a company’s environmentally-friendly business record, for example, took greater precedence among more Americans (71 percent) than how much a product costs (44 percent).

Granted, consumers place higher expectations on some industries’ commitment to CSR initiatives than others; according to a recent Clutch survey, 70 percent of respondents said they associate the food sector—namely, restaurants and food retailers—as uniquely poised to tackle issues such as food insecurity in their local communities. Additionally, 70 percent said they expect the tech industry to take the lead in addressing data and privacy issues, and 65 percent want the fashion industry to invest more in the use of ethically-sourced materials.

Marketers are keenly aware of this, of course, and as a result, Corporate Social Responsibility programs have exploded in popularity in recent years. The Hotwire survey found that more than half of the marketers polled (61 percent) believe their organization should take a more proactive stance on social issues. It’s a nice idea, I suppose, and each of these topics invokes conversations worth having, but there’s just something vaguely opportunistic about the notion of a company whose lone priority is profit stealing the mic every time a controversial issue arises in the national conversation. Does anyone actually believe Gillette exists to cure toxic masculinity, or that it’s Nike’s mission to end police brutality?

If those aforementioned companies’ recent earnings are any indication, some clearly do. And therein lies the problem. Companies that shape public opinion through self-congratulatory acts of advocacy are simply responding to consumer demand. The greater challenge will be convincing Americans in this “woke” age that buying things will never alone suffice as a moral value expression. The socially-conscious shopper conducts a performative display to take a stand on something he knows he’ll never be called on to actually fix; it allows us to engage in these narcissistic moral purity contests where we compete to achieve the prestige of being labeled the most conscientious among our peer group. But hey, it feels good to believe we’re making a difference, right? I wonder how much these “enlightened” consumers actually do in the way of directly helping their communities, be it through volunteering at a shelter, or canvassing for a political candidate, but why do any of that when you can buy a pint of Ben & Jerry’s and leave with the feeling that you’re Rosa Parks? The undue moral scrutiny we give our purchasing habits feeds a lazy misconception that the private sector can do all the ethical heavy-lifting for us and we don’t have to do anything aside from buy certain products. This isn’t how reality works.

Perhaps it’s not surprising, then, that more consumers are beginning to question the motives of companies who engage in CSR. According to a Harris Poll Reputation Quotient study, 40 percent of Americans said they believe companies that embark on CSR initiatives only do so to bolster their public image. My guess is we can expect that number to surge in the coming years.

For this reason, it isn’t difficult to see how CSR initiatives can result in disaster. Most people know a fake when they see one, and for this reason, CSR carries a lot of attendant risk. Indeed, one recent study (see full story on page 9) found that silence might be most companies’ best policy on social issues, as consumers are less likely to boycott brands that remain mum on political issues they care about than they are to stop supporting brands that take a stance on issues with which they disagree. Perhaps this is one more reason, as the adage goes, that if you aren’t willing to walk the walk, maybe you shouldn’t talk the talk. — Jon Gingerich

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BOLD makes an impact. Change inspires. We reveal the possibilities for your brand.
Negative publicity response can boost brand value

Research shows that companies can sometimes gain value when responding to a celebrity endorser whose bad misbehavior has threatened their brand.

By Jon Gingerich

It happens all the time: a brand’s celebrity spokesperson finds him/herself at the center of a controversy, which unwittingly generates negative publicity for the endorsing brand. While currently one of marketers’ preferred avenues for driving brand awareness and boosting sales, celebrity endorsement remains a practice area also wrought with challenges, chief among them being the liabilities they present when celebrities behave poorly, and what disastrous effects these crises can have on a company’s reputation and stock returns.

Now, new research sheds some light on what economic effects a company’s reaction to these unforeseen events might have.

The study, which was conducted jointly by researchers at the University of Connecticut and Free University of Berlin, analyzed 128 separate instances between 1988 and 2016 involving a celebrity endorser who generated negative publicity while being under contract with a publicly-traded company. The study then evaluated the varying reactions from the 230 companies affected (suspend or maintain the spokesperson relationship, or offer no response at all) as well as response time (slow vs. fast), to identify how those responses corresponded with daily gains or losses in the company’s stock in the financial markets.

Aside from yielding some actionable insights regarding best steps and response time for brands that find themselves in the midst of a spokesperson controversy, the study also yielded a surprise finding: depending on their response to the event, brands can actually gain value following an incident in which a celebrity endorser generated negative publicity.

Timing is key in a crisis. In analyzing companies’ speed of response, the nature of its response, and how that response impacted returns, the study discovered that a faster announcement or statement after an incident of negative publicity saw company value increasing by 2.10 percent over the next four trading weeks. According to researchers, these positive effects held for different types of responses to endorser-related scandals.

These results are predicated on a fast response time. The study found the “window of opportunity” for companies responding to a negative event is relatively small, and that the positive effects of a firm’s response on the daily abnormal stock returns begin diminishing quickly (by -.184 percent) about 72 hours after the negative event becomes public. After that, a response thereafter becomes ineffective, and “this diminishing effect becomes increasingly more negative with each day the firm does not respond,” the study’s authors wrote.

One thing’s for sure: a response is always warranted. The study discovered that some definitive action on behalf of a company is always better than offering no response at all. Regardless of whether the company chooses to suspend or maintain its relationship with the endorser, issuing a statement announcing its plans is more likely to yield positive abnormal stock returns than remaining quiet.

“If the firm decides to remain quiet, investors do not receive any signal whether the firm is aware of the event,” the study’s authors wrote. “This ongoing uncertainty will lead investors to correct the initial reaction, and consequently stock returns will be more negative on the following days.”

Finally, the study’s authors warned that simply because these findings suggest that companies can actually gain value when responding to an endorser-related crisis, that shouldn’t suggest companies do something to artificially cause a negative event, simply so they can quickly respond to it.

“Such willful deceit,” the study’s authors conclude, “will backfire immediately if it becomes public.”

Companies in recent years have internalized the notion that taking a stance on some of the pressing social, environmental and political challenges facing the world today is a great way to build awareness and engender a favorable public perception.

As it turns out, however, data now suggests that staying mum on these issues also has its own value, and might be the safe bet for businesses looking to avoid a PR backlash, according to a recent survey conducted by D.C.-based research and consulting firm Clutch.

Clutch's survey offers a rare caveat for today's corporate advocacy endeavors and other social responsibility initiatives in the sense that it suggests businesses that remain silent on social or political issues run a lower chance of losing customers than those that take a stand.

According to the survey, nearly two-thirds of consumers (63 percent) claim they're likely to continue shopping at businesses that stay silent on issues they care about. A smaller percentage of consumers, however (58 percent), said they'd continue shopping at a business that takes a stance on an issue with which they disagree.

Suffice to say, speaking out in today's divisive political and social climate always carries some attendant risk, as the move could alienate existing advocates, not to mention the possible backlash that can occur if a company loses control of the intended message.

Not all issues equal

The survey found that 15 percent of consumers are likely to stop shopping with a company that speaks out on political issues in a manner with which they disagree, and 10 percent said the same about companies that address issues related to gender. Only five percent said their buying decisions would be deterred by companies' stances on human rights issues, and only two percent cited environmental stances as a deal-breaker.

Still, a majority of respondents (71 percent) remain adamant that they want businesses to speak out on social issues, and more than half (52 percent) think businesses should also air their sociopolitical stances publicly via social media.

Consumers particularly want businesses to tackle issues related to the environment (89 percent), human rights (80 percent), gender (74 percent) and politics (56 percent).

Clutch's "2019 PR and Corporate Social Responsibility Survey" polled 420 U.S. consumers who reported making a purchase within the last six months. Research was conducted at the end of December using brand intelligence research company Survata.
Executives matter most in crowded age of influencers

Digitally-enabled media influencers and executive thought leadership, once novel approaches employed to engage with targeted audience, have become commonplace. What matters now is deciding which strategic option makes sense for you.

By Arti Patel

While many perceive influencers and thought leaders as actors fulfilling the same roles within the marketing ecosystem on the surface, they’re necessarily different. When deciding where to focus your marketing strategy, understanding the differences between the influencer and thought leadership approaches—and how they facilitate your business goals—is key.

These distinctions come down to two areas: their respective value propositions and preferred platforms.

**Value proposition**

While influencers’ value is rooted in quantity, thought leaders’ value is rooted in quality.

There are five main types of influencers—celebrities, macro-influencers, professional influencers, micro-influencers, and brand advocates—with each employed to bring about specific business outcomes.

Influencers’ worth is determined by the size and reach of their audience. As an influencer, your audience volume determines your power rankings, fees and standing within the professional hierarchy.

Conversely, thought leaders, especially of the C-suite variety, are judged on their business knowledge and subject-matter expertise. Often, these individuals are proactively looking to invest their time by sharing insights and intelligence for the benefit of their professional industry. Their ability to shift the momentum of an overall marketing plan is quite regularly undervalued, and often dictated by the types, and audiences of, the publications that feature them.

**Preferred platforms**

Because of their different value propositions—and goals—influencers and thought leaders warrant different platforms. Influencers, as marketers—or sellers—of their own personal brands, prefer more consumer-oriented platforms like Instagram and Facebook, while thought leaders—more likely to target business decision-makers—focus on LinkedIn.

While influencers speak to an audience of potential—and more direct—buyers, thought leaders speak to business decision-makers. So, when targeting a professional audience is paramount, LinkedIn’s 260 million active users worldwide represent an opportunity that can’t be overlooked.

Underlining this opportunity, LinkedIn itself has appointed official “influencers” from an ever-changing global collective of leaders and innovators like Bill and Melinda Gates, Arianna Huffington and Richard Branson to emphasize its focus on discussions around trending business issues.

So, what makes thought leadership so valuable right now?

**A defined market**

In an ecosystem dominated by influencer marketing, it then seems like the obvious tactic to prioritize within your broader marketing strategy. Nevertheless, today’s environment—which has created a stronger public appetite for differentiated, forward-looking thought leadership—gives you reason to rethink that plan.

Trust inequality between the informed public and mass population is at a record high today, driving the creation of a large, underserved audience hoping to discover information on its own. While trust in social media as a news source remains low at 43 percent, trust in search and traditional media is at a historic high globally, both at 65 percent. This means there’s a market for executive thought leadership content, particularly published in traditional media outlets.

**Benefit your bottom line**

A recent study of B2B thought leadership impact noted that while decision makers on the whole are spending more time reading thought leadership content—at least one hour per week—some senior decision makers are actively willing to pay a premium to work with companies that have clearly articulated their vision via thought leadership content.

Further, the study also noted B2B marketers and salespeople significantly underestimate the positive influence of thought leadership content on demand generation and sales efforts. Execute this content correctly and it becomes an increasingly meaningful tool in your marketing arsenal, helping to encourage positive brand sentiment, as well as foster meaningful public discourse across your consumer base.

Digital platforms like LinkedIn play a role too, serving as a launch point to help C-suite executives create a demand for their expert opinions, especially on trending news topics ripe for public discourse and engagement. By sharing insights on industry happenings and/or publishing authored content, thought leaders can take advantage of an opportunity to drive conversation with colleagues, peers and customers about a host of topics.

If you engage in executive thought leadership, remember these four rules:

**Identify your key audiences.** Looking to directly reach consumers? Then implementing an influencer campaign might be the right choice. Otherwise, and especially if you’re hoping to engage with key business decision-makers, you’re best served by leaning into the thought leadership approach—and its core distribution channels like LinkedIn.

**Always add value.** The abundance of executive thought leadership and influencer content will continue to grow in the next few years. With a cacophony of voices growing in intensity, it’s not necessarily being first or loudest that matters most, but rather the quality—or originality—of those insights that have the biggest impact. Once your goal—and corresponding platform—is confirmed, you should conduct research into what’s already being said and identify ways your C-suite executives can rise above the fray and provide noteworthy insights to reinforce their business acumen.

**Be consistent.** Unlike influencer partnerships that are planned with a prospective end date in mind, thought leadership done correctly should only enhance and strengthen the relationship between the consumer and the brand over long periods of time. C-suite executives who participate should do so consistently. It will likely take several years to build up an engaged core audience, and the time investment is worth it.

**Realness matters.** Authenticity is key to the entire operation. Whether working with an internal team, outside counsel or going solo, a successful thought leader will always endeavor to remain true to his or her unique voice. The public will always detect and peel back a façade.

By installing an executive thought leadership plan, you stand to bridge information gaps between industry stakeholders through knowledge sharing, which gives you a direct opportunity to tangibly impact your bottom line.

Arti Patel

Arti Patel is an Account Supervisor who works with teams across Bliss Integrated Communication’s healthcare, financial and professional services practice groups.
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Content by committee: the challenges and an antidote

The Pareto Principle, when coupled with a rigorous process around content creation, can foster optimal collaboration without the usual headaches.

By Ken MacFayden

James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, by most accounts, rests atop the literary canon. Often overlooked, when it was first published, the reviews were mixed. One critic, a Harvard professor, diagnosed Joyce as being “in an advanced stage of psychic disintegration,” while the author’s contemporary, Virginia Woolf, called the book “a misfire” and “a bore,” surmising it came across as diffuse, brackish and pretentious.

The point isn’t that either side is right or wrong. But the disparate opinions—for a novel considered the greatest work of fiction ever written—should underscore that when it comes to any finished creative work, a definitive consensus is more of an abstract idea than a realistic outcome.

Given that most content-marketing efforts, at their heart, are collaborative endeavors, it speaks to why strategy and process are so important to align objectives and define responsibilities. Moreover, understanding the subjectivity involved will help contributors embrace the Pareto Principle, which is a prerequisite to establish an efficient and productive content-marketing program.

“Striving to better, oft we mar what’s well.”

Ray Dalio, founder of hedge fund Bridgewater Associates, is active on social media. Each day he posts a different “life principle” that reflects his philosophy around leadership and investing. In one April post, he implored his followers to “be an imperfectionist,” explaining too much time is spent “on little differences at the margins at the expense of the important things.”

It’s not exactly a controversial take. Similar sentiments have been expressed throughout time, going back to Confucius, Shakespeare and Voltaire. Yet dissenters will hold that embracing imperfection equates to “a lack of effort,” which is how multiple commentators responded to Dalio’s post.

This may be true in certain roles with no margin for error. You wouldn’t want your brain surgeon mumbling under her breath that “perfection is the enemy of progress.” The goal of content marketing, however, is to drive awareness and influence consumer behaviors. And if counsel can’t agree on an Oxford comma or whether sentences should ever begin with a conjunction, those micro quibbles—when multiplied—prevent content from ever seeing the light of day.

The Pareto Principle, while not precise, contends that roughly 80 percent of your results stem from 20 percent of your efforts. Applied to content, this idea can help organizations determine where, exactly, efforts are being wasted. Armed with this perspective, they can devise a process that focuses exclusively on the 20 percent that matters.

It’s not about striving for anything less than perfection; it’s about recognizing at which point refinement turns into paralysis and at what expense to the objectives of a given marketing initiative.

“A horse, designed by committee.”

Jeff Bezos famously instituted a “two pizza” rule at Amazon. The mandate effectively limits the participation on a project to the number of people who can be fed by two large pies. The thinking, as conveyed in Brad Stone’s book *The Everything Store*, is that by keeping projects small and agile, a concentrated team is more productive without having to coordinate across multiple groups.

Stone described it as an offshoot of Frederick Brooks’ observation that adding manpower to complex tech initiatives slows rather than accelerates progress. An added benefit is that smaller teams also obviate groupthink, while empowering independent, innovative ideas, a process Bezos referred to as “wandering” in his most recent shareholder letter.

This is an important concept in content creation. When analyzed through the Pareto Principle lens, much of the wasted effort can be minimized through being more discriminating in determining who participates and at what stage of the process.

David Hume, in his essay “On the Standards of Taste,” spent more than 7,500 words discussing the qualifications that should be mandatory for critics and editors. Yet, absent a process, everyone from interns to third-party consultants are invited to scrutinize what would otherwise be a finished product. Process wise, this equates to a game of 52-card pickup.

The most seamless and simple process is when a content champion emerges who relishes the writing role and has a nose for what’s topical and interesting. The issue, however, is that writing often takes a backseat to other priorities that comprise executives’ day to day. Most organizations, in turn, will either create an in-house editorial function or tap third parties to oversee a more holistic content strategy.

Our agency views the content-creation process as a series of concentric circles. The ideation phase aims to be inclusive, and initially solicits ideas and commentary from wider, cross-functional teams. We specialize in financial services, so brainstorming calls may include portfolio managers, analysts, business-development or marketing executives, or even third parties such as academic researchers. Upon digesting the discussion, we’ll come back to the wider group with a series of proposed themes or story angles.

Once a topic is determined, we then work directly with the proposed “author,” whose name will be on the article. Through a short interview, we’ll gain a better understanding around the points that matter most to the targeted audience, as well as any relevant examples or anecdotes. Our objective is to minimize the effort required from clients so they can dedicate more time to creating a consistent stream of content, which is when the effort, ultimately, pays dividends.

Some writers short change the value of an outline. When collaborating, though, this is the most important step to foster alignment and set expectations. It also represents a point in the process when it’s still feasible to change course, providing a check point for would-be dissenters to either voice concerns or sign off on the direction of the piece. With a quorum in place, and with a greenlight on the proposed narrative, the editorial team proceeds to draft the article, working directly with the author to iterate and refine it. Usually, a finished product is ready after one or two rounds of edits. Once it goes through compliance, it’s then ready for distribution. At this point it can be incorporated into marketing materials, reinforce social media campaigns, be pitched out to trade publications as a byline, or support any number of internal or external communication strategies.

The process works when the challenges in forming a consensus are resolved in the outline stage, allowing a smaller team to then concentrate on one executive’s perceived view of “perfection.” In keeping with the Pareto Principle, the process breaks the endless iteration loop, marked by detached contributors whose “two cents” can translate into a dollar’s worth of interference in which the entire process is reopened and recycled with every passing suggestion. Again, this is not the fault of contributors,
An integrated marketing and PR framework to guide brands through all stages of growth.
What to do when you can’t believe your eyes

Clever editing, misleading titles and manufactured images are making it easier to deceive and manipulate stakeholders. Here’s what communicators can do to combat this truth decay.

By Christine Barney

Once upon a time, the world was black and white: we knew the good guys from the bad. At least we thought we did, and we enjoyed that clarity. We trusted our information sources to provide us with facts.

Technology now makes it easier for our eyes to deceive us and has accelerated the rate of “truth decay,” a term coined by the RAND Corporation. This gradual decline of the ability to know what’s true and what isn’t presents serious challenges for organizations worldwide. What is truth decay and what can be done to protect the relationship brands have with stakeholders?

First let’s look at what contributes to this phenomenon. It can be narrowed down to two trends:

Society’s growing hunger for the sensational. The expression “if it bleeds, it leads” has existed for decades. In a chicken-or-the-egg scenario, the debate continues as to whether news media outlets overemphasize negative news to attract audiences or if they’re just serving up audience preferences. The sensational headlines known as clickbait are just a new variation on an old theme. About four years ago, I started hearing reporters ask for support in promoting their stories, because clicks were part of their performance metrics. Remembering that at the end of the day, most information sources are also businesses looking to make a profit makes it easier to understand why they mirror back the news consumers want. And the news we want is visual, dramatic and served up in small bites for easy consumption. The 24/7 news cycle creates a constant need for content, and the reduced resources at news sources means fact checking falls by the wayside. So, with less scrutiny, there’s likely to be less truth even from trusted sources.

Technology makes it easy to manipulate stakeholders. At a recent Page Society event, I heard RAND Corporation Deputy Chief Technology Officer Dr. Rand Watzman make the audience very uncomfortable by showing examples of both simple and Mission-Impossible-like techniques to create news. The simple technique included clever editing such as a video cut short to show a brand spokesperson seemingly ignoring victims after a tragedy. Or consider the misleading copy from captions on actual photos like the hoax about the Sphinx in Egypt being covered in snow when the photo was actually of a miniature Sphinx in Tokyo. This sophisticated technique includes manufactured images and sound. Photo-shop has been around a long time, but it’s getting harder and harder to detect image doctoring in photos, not to mention video. With fewer than 15 seconds of someone’s image and voice, you can now create avatars that say or do whatever you want. These deepfake videos were first reported in 2017, and soon fake celebrity porn was making news and being banned on social channels. In April 2018, Jordan Peele and Jonah Peretti created a deepfake using Barack Obama as a public service announcement regarding the danger of deepfakes. While the phenomenon of creating fakes isn’t new, it’s the realism of the evolving techniques that makes their impact more powerful. As artificial intelligence continues to advance, the ability to identify and control fakes will become even more of a challenge.

There are numerous examples of how manufactured and forced perspective erodes trust and impacts situations in everything from elections to healthcare. The increasing ease of these techniques is what has accelerated the rate of truth decay. So, what can ethical communicators do to combat this wave of misinformation and protect their brands? Consider these five guidelines.

Don’t blame the platforms or the government or expect them to solve the problem. We may shake our heads when news media run a hoax photo or if a social media platform helps a fake video go viral, but regulation isn’t going to make these issues go away and the platforms themselves can’t police the quantity of content that goes up each second. Expecting someone else to fix the problem means a very long wait. You can’t regulate your way to ethical behavior. But just like with anti-bullying programs, brands are in a unique position to put a spotlight on the problem and model good behavior.

Keep your head out of the sand. Don’t assume people won’t be influenced by “fakes.” We’ve spent a long time accepting that “seeing is believing” and it will take time for people to adjust to a new era where they can’t trust what they see. Take them seriously. Monitor and track attacks on your brand and be prepared to not just respond but anticipate.

Go on the offensive. Protect your brand by proactively telling your story to build a wall of positive perception and trust. For example, if you transparently and consistently put out video of your manufacturing process, stakeholders are more likely to question a fake that says you rely on child labor. Be prepared to fight fire with fire—or video with video—and aggressively debunk myths. Just being right isn’t enough. If given the choice between watching a two-minute video of a car on fire versus reading your brand’s press release on how safe your cars are in terms of fire injuries, we all know what people will choose. And think about clickbait strategies with your message. For a company focusing on energy efficiency, we saw a dramatic difference in response to the phrase “are you losing money” vs. “how to save money.”

Predict the future. Technology is changing rapidly; your job will never be done. Anticipate what could be the next possible attack on your brand. What new apps are out there that might present an opportunity or a challenge for you?

Make friends. Being on the defensive is always hard. But a tried and true public relations strategy still works today: have other people say good things about you, and the rewards will follow. So, ensure you have a strong circle of third-party supporters who can come to your aid, help tell your story and act as truth protectors for your brand.

Are the days of absolute truth over? Perhaps. But the news isn’t all bad. We too have more tools and more technology to use in the fight to tell our stories. Ultimately, in this new gray world, communicators have a bigger job than ever in shaping stakeholders’ perceptions and slowing the rate of truth decay.

Christine Barney is CEO and Managing Partner of rbb Communications.

PR news brief

APCO cuts ties with Huawei

APCO Worldwide has ended its nine-year relationship with Huawei, the Chinese electronics/telecommunications giant at the heart of the U.S. battle with China on the technology and trade fronts. “We have reached the end of the contract and we came to a mutual decision not to continue the contract,” an APCO staffer told O’Dwyer’s. Former 14-term Congressman Don Borker (D-WA) had handled APCO’s representation with Huawei, officially terminated April 19. The U.S. slapped sanctions on Huawei, which is heavily subsidized by China’s government, for violating a ban on the sale of high-tech equipment to Iran.

Christine Barney

Christine Barney is CEO and Managing Partner of rbb Communications.
THE LINE BETWEEN
LEFT
RIGHT
BRAIN

HAS OFFICIALLY BEEN ERASED.
Straight path to success not necessary

The route most of us take to get where we are in the professional communications world doesn’t necessarily move in a straight line.

By Thomas P. Butler

I
n April, I had two opportunities to appear before groups of high school students. One was to speak to a marketing class and the other was for Financial Literacy Month.

The objective on both occasions was to instill a greater understanding in these 16-18-year-old students regarding the professional opportunities that lie ahead, in whichever career path they select, and the importance education plays in building their skillsets.

What I’ve learned is that the professional path most of us took to get where we are now, doesn’t always—or even typically—move in a straight line. Diversity of skills and experiences among my team of fellow strategic communicators at Butler Associates is the key to what makes our campaigns have greater impact for the clients we serve.

For me, the journey began with the study of Economics. How odd was it that a young man who’d expected he’d wind up on Wall Street—and had worked on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange for a summer during college—would instead wind up in media communications?

But those are the paths that eventually intersected.

A beehive filled with top journalists

My own career began in the press office of New York City Hall, dealing with government and elected officials, public hearings and learning about strategic messaging regarding legislation and the operations of government. It was also a place that afforded daily interaction with some truly remarkable and esteemed journalists.

In the late 1980s, New York City had multiple daily newspapers with circulations close to or exceeding a million daily readers: The New York Times, Daily News, Post, Newsday and so much more. In New York, they say, all roads lead to City Hall, and it was truly a great place to cut your teeth in the media world.

The reporters covering the business of New York City were seasoned veterans in chronicling and editorializing about politics, real estate, business, taxation and finance. I believe the New York Times alone had four reporters assigned to the bureau and a columnist or two whom be there on occasion as well.

City Hall in lower Manhattan—which was only a five-minute walk to the major financial markets: NYSE, the American Stock Exchange or the Commodities Exchanges—was also a magnet for street and political theater, as an impassioned press conference or a well-executed publicity stunt could garner major headlines. We lived and worked there day after day, alongside so many members of the press who also called this beehive home.

Our public and media events included U.S. Senators, famous magazine publishers and billionaires, the first U.S. visit by Nelson Mandela, and one including the greatest living heavyweight boxing champs of the last 50 years, all above and beyond the fascinating business of the day. It was undeniably a magnet for the famous, successful and influential of the city.

My schooling had certainly not prepared me for this diverse universe, nor gotten me there. Instead it was youthful curiosity, interest and family background centered in and around politics and the feeling that, hey, why not give this “press office thing” a try, because if it doesn’t work out after a few years, Wall Street and a career in banking will still be there.

Transition to agency life

With this rapid-paced environment of shaping client announcements, scheduling press conferences, working on the infrastructure of public events and ghostwriting, it’s rather easy to expose the skillset deficiencies in any young aspiring communications staffer. A fast-paced newsroom environment serves as an ideal backdrop to the equally active agency world.

It’s not just writing, but learning to pitch, how to compose effective bylined or opinion leader articles, linking your message and clients into breaking news cycles. The continuing transition and expansion of digital news delivery has rewritten the playbook, speeding up the learning process and forcing veteran practitioners to constantly adapt.

Intersecting paths

Going back to that business degree, it has served me quite well, given that a significant part of our growing communications practice is focused on clients in the world of finance, business, real estate, infrastructure, construction services, hospitality and the legal profession.

Having the capability to link CEOs and top industry executives into the news, offering expertise about business events, economic data and happenings, has kept their names and faces on a heavy rotation of influential business news channels and columns.

And as for the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, where I once thought my future would lie, it’s instead my present, although more as a financial newsroom.

Just a few weeks before, we were there with the CEO of an infrastructure finance firm who was announcing the launch of a new initiative to invest in Public-Private-Partnership infrastructure projects all across the United States. His investors are college endowments, hedge funds and others who see the value in the investment community stepping into roles that were once only addressed by government.

Once hoping to be among those who built a financial career from the dynamic action taking place on the floor, now we were able to use it almost as a stage to broadcast favorable messaging for our clients.

From ringing the closing bell on the NASDAQ Exchange, to stories of our clients’ success running across the stock ticker at the NASDAQ Market Site in Times Square, I’ve been able to combine the preparation from my younger days with the reality of my current work to bring clients into that space to help them propel their messages.

Three decades after entering the professional communications world, I can look back and recall countless client experiences, journalist interactions and winning campaign results, and a few occasions when prudent advice was offered, but clients simply chose to go a different route.

While the study of other professions, be they accounting or law, does perhaps have more of a straight path, as strategic communicators it’s exactly our diverse backgrounds—and constant on-the-job-learning—that give our guidance and counsel greater strength.

Thankfully, on my way up in this business, I had the good fortune of smart and kind mentors that took the time to guide and direct me. They saw a hustle and a willingness to work, an until-I-get-it-right attitude. While I might’ve blushed back then, when told there was a better way to get something done, lessons from those more experienced peers and mentors do make up the success we build to reach the height of our careers.

Thomas P. Butler is President and Founder of Butler Associates, LLC.
We believe that if you wait until a crisis hits, it’s too late. Our decades of experience dealing with crises from natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes to manmade disasters like terrorism, drug cartel violence, data breach and exploding oil wells in the Gulf of Mexico makes us the perfect partner for anyone facing a crisis.

WE VIEW CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH A HOLISTIC 4 STAGE LENS:

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Inoculating against bubble-think

The vaccine debate is just one example of how big data can help us get beyond our own perspectives to better understand the world as it really is.

It was a familiar refrain for many of us after November, 2016: “We’re living in a bubble! We don’t understand the people!”

Since that time, we all see this same story repeated. Confirmation bias is more powerful than any one of us realizes. Social media just tells us what we want to hear. Our news media of choice caters to narrowly defined groups and views.

Likely, every agency has been challenging itself to get outside of this bubble. We’re beginning to realize that “big data,” for all its faults, also presents an opportunity to get outside our own perspectives and better understand the world as it really is.

Few issues in healthcare represent this problem of self-selecting information as clearly as the debate around vaccines. For groups on both sides, the view is 100 per cent clear: vaccines are either a miracle of modern medicine, or a harmful hoax. But even this level of understanding lacks the depth needed to solve the problem.

JPA has developed a tool we call Gretel, the only collection of health conversation data that cross-reference advocacy, news and social media and online influencers. It’s a powerful engine that allows us to see across a universe of voices to zero in on what’s really going on, and it’s often full of surprises that we follow like breadcrumbs.

When we dig into the data in Gretel on the vaccine conversation, here’s what we see: the medical establishment, with all its scientific wisdom, spouts data points, study results and clinical facts. They make their case with MDs and PhDs and rely on traditional medical organizations and traditional media sources to carry their message.

On the other side of the issue, anti-vaxxers lay into the dangers of big pharma, the harm in our broken medical system, the problems with chemicals and putting bad things in our bodies. They make the case with moms and kids and regular folks who’ve allegedly been harmed by a medical hoax. News and social media focused on popular culture tend to pick up this message and spread the word. There’s a dash of pseudo-science thrown in, but the focus is on people who believe they’ve been affected and subsequently marginalized by mainstream beliefs.

In between these two camps exists a large, moveable middle of mainstream popular culture. Whose arguments do you think are more compelling to more of these people in this middle? They’re not enticed by data. They’re not motivated by scientists. They’re moved to action by emotional appeals that feed into an increasing sense that our system is broken, that they’re pawns in a game of industry profits.

The expertise fails to land. The scientists and so-called “elites” talk only to themselves, and the people on the side of what’s best for public health lose messaging ground again and again to the anti-vaccine movement. A premise that seems ridiculous to many continues to gain steam.

It’s possible that recent outbreaks will lead to a reset in the discussion. However, instead of focusing just on studies and data and scientific expertise, we should be talking more about how our systems are designed to protect us, how small actions can save lives, and the real fears parents have about losing their children to highly contagious diseases.

Conversation taking shape

It’s obvious that different health issues require different communications approaches. We now, however, can literally see the shape of a conversation, where the bubbles are and where they’re not, to determine how best to reach specific audiences.

For example, the oncology conversation takes a very different shape from the highly-fragmented vaccine debate. In oncology, we see very little bubble-think, because people are highly motivated to share as much information as possible with each other. We see this in the data, and we see this manifest itself across the oncology landscape. In recent online discussion about lung cancer, patients, oncologists, radiologists and pathologists were all engaged, participating equally, and sharing knowledge with each other. When does that ever happen?

But we also can see distinctions that the professionals themselves may not even realize. While arguable, it has been said that oncologists in many ways are closer to their patients and the patient experience than other types of specialists. Oncologists may group themselves by their specialties, but we see another difference between groups of oncologists known as medical oncologists and surgical oncologists.

The surgical oncologists—accustomed to dealing with patients in an operating room—are less connected to patient groups and influencers. On the other hand, medical oncologists—face-to-face every day with patients—are highly engaged with these groups. Depending on the communications need, we must reach these two groups in very different ways.

By mapping the relationships between the top influencers on an issue and then grouping them together based on what sources they pay attention to, we can generate an understanding of the conversation structure. As we see in these examples, different audiences connect in different ways around issues, with very real implications for how we design an effective communications program.

Social becomes measuring stick

Social media provides a powerful channel to reach audiences, but it also offers a new avenue to understand the media landscape and to decide not just which outlet, but which media platforms work best to engage specific audiences.

In the old days, we could only measure readership of a media outlet. We were lucky to be able to perform surveys or focus groups to better understand which outlets and messages were landing with specific audiences. We didn’t have the trove of public data we do today, documenting what content drives which conversations among which audiences.

Our experience reaching emergency room physicians is a great example of unexpected insights hiding beneath the surface. In looking at how to best reach them, we were surprised to find they were more likely to cite blogs than medical trade publications in sharing information with each other. For the rest of us, blogs peaked a few years ago, but with emergency room doctors they’re continuing to thrive.

Taking a closer look, we saw these physicians love to share stories about odd things that happen in the emergency room. If you want to reach an emergency room physician, you’ll hit a home run if you can tie your cause to an unusual patient case and get it covered in a blog.

It’s exciting to realize how much better we can understand our audiences at both a macro level and on an individual level, thanks to the power of big data and data...
Innovation that’s timeless.
The core of your communications strategy

Considerations for building out your company’s thought leadership platform.

By Darlene Doyle

Thought leadership is a key foundational element to your communications program. Authorities with expertise in a specialized field just seem important on a visceral level, but we’ve also been told by experts of its influence on buying decisions, market education, and on building your brand. And we’ve heard it directly from the source itself. 96 percent of B2B buyers reported wanting content with more input from industry thought leaders, according to HubSpot, a nod to thought leadership’s impact on the path to purchase. That should be good enough, right? But how do you explain to a C-suite executive who’s rather focus efforts elsewhere in the business why this is worth their time, energy and effort to establish themselves as a thought leader?

We all have people in our personal and professional lives whose voices we trust. A blog we follow, speaking engagements we attend or social channels we peruse consistently because we like what they have to say. They educate us on a topic of interest, provide fresh perspective and sometimes, hit us in the gut with a salient point that makes us say, “I never thought of it that way before.” That’s the quintessential thought leader. Thought leadership is a powerful way to connect with your audience. It brings you—and your company—into relevant and meaningful conversations. And, most importantly, it builds trust. In a LinkedIn study of more than 1,300 business decision makers and C-suite executives, 82 percent reported that thought leadership has increased trust in an organization. People listen to and buy from people and, by extension, companies they trust.

Here are some key considerations for building out your company’s thought leadership platform.

Set your strategy

Building out a thought leadership platform can feel overwhelming. It can be tempting to just dive into the tactics and content creation machine. Before you lock yourself into a room and start typing your own version of Moby Dick, take some time to set your strategy. Define why thought leadership matters for your industry and company. Is your company early stage in a new market (you may need to hyper-focus on educational content) or late stage in a mature market (where differentiation and customer success stories are key)? Are there gaps in the current resources/research available in your space? Are there voices of authority? And, if so, what are they saying? This will help determine how and where thought leadership can work for your business.

Define your thought leadership pillars

We call this finding the white space. Put your data and analytics tools to work by taking a look at what the market is talking about: where’s the conversation focused, what are the trending topics, what are your competitors saying, and what are they not saying? Map these conversations back to what topics and messages matter to your company and identify where there’s an opening in the conversation to bring forth your company’s expertise. A trending topic that doesn’t map back to your business doesn’t serve your needs. The sweet spot is in using this data to clearly define your thought leadership pillars and drive focus to the conversations that will have meaningful impact on your business.

Develop your POV

Creating compelling points of view to drive your thought leadership pillars is critical to success. If you’re saying the same thing everyone else is, you’re not setting yourself or your company apart from the pack. In fact, a contrarian point of view can be exactly what’s needed, but equally important is an insightful one. Put yourself in your customer’s or prospect’s shoes; this is your opportunity to help them. How can your content educate them? Create a new way of thinking about a business problem or challenge? Plant a seed for how a new technology application could work for their business? Or correct misinformation that exists in the market? This is your chance to join the dialogue and start building trust.

Choose your cast

Outline your thought leadership bench and align pillars and topics to their areas of expertise. Being thoughtful about creating clear “swim lanes” for your thought leaders is critical to establishing credible and consistent industry voices. Beyond expertise, it’s also important to consider “passion topics” for your thought leaders. When someone is speaking on a topic they are passionate about, they bring another level of energy and enthusiasm to the conversation that translates to their audience. If your thought leaders aren’t excited about or don’t believe in their talk track, it’s a non-starter. Passion topics create authenticity.

Make it omnichannel

Creating a thought leader is, at its core, about creating someone’s personal brand. Our “brands” are three-dimensional, and our strategies need to be as well. The core considerations here are your content mediums and channels, which are influenced by where your audience lives. Are there “must attend” events you should be speaking at? What are the top-read industry publications you need to be in? What social media channels are critical? If your audience isn’t on Instagram, don’t waste efforts on building a presence there. Focus on the channels and mediums that matter most.

Back it up with content and data

Your content is the lifeblood of your thought leadership strategy, supported by the fact that 47 percent of buyers viewed 3-5 pieces of content before engaging with a sales rep, according to Demand Gen Report. And this content will come in many shapes and sizes. As you’re considering your channels, also consider your mediums. Long-form content plays a big part—bylines, blogs, eBooks and LinkedIn posts—and can provide essential platforms to express your ideas and POVs. But don’t forget about the power of short-form, videos, quotes and posts. In a recent survey, 64 percent of respondents said watching a marketing video on Facebook influenced a purchase decision in the last month, according to Animoto. Whether it’s video or some other type of content, they all serve a purpose in building your platform. Understand the unique power of each and put them to work for your brand. And back it up with data. Data makes your content sing and grounds your POVs in reality.

Don’t be self-serving

It can be a fine line to walk at times in ensuring your thought leadership platform supports your business objectives but doesn’t become self-serving. Your product and innovation stories have a time and place but your thought leadership content needs to serve a greater good. There can be tie-backs to your business, but you lose your audience when you begin using your thought leadership platform as your product or company platform. Turn on your listening channels—on social, blogs and in the media—to learn about what the industry is talking about and learn how you can con-
Data matters, but can it make you fall in love?

The short answer is no. Data gives us invaluable insights about how people feel, what they believe, and how they behave. But to create advertising and marketing that moves them to act requires living, breathing, and endlessly clever human creativity.

At W2O, that’s how we turn deep, data-derived insights into human ideas that inspire human action.

Visit us at W2Ogroup.com
Thought leadership requires thoughts and leadership

Companies must come to grips with the fact that not all leaders, no matter how successful, are necessarily thought leaders.

As a firm that helps organizations build, grow and protect their brands and reputations, it’s common for clients to ask us to help establish them as thought leaders. After all, what company doesn’t want to be the go-to expert in their respective space?

But logic suggests that not everyone can be a thought leader, and not every thought leader is the same. Part of determining thought-leadership strategy means looking in the mirror and asking whether you have the discipline, the courage and the vision to make it happen.

Thought leader profiles

If Yogi Berra were still alive, he’d say the best thought leaders are ones with compelling thoughts and strong leadership. Simple, right?

Nope.

First, an organization must come to grips with what kind of thought leader it can be.

At Padilla, we generally see three types:

The sage: this is the company with a long history who has seen it all and can put industry change into context. Successful “sage” thought leaders have the courage to question their own status quo, because if they don’t, someone else will. Microsoft would fall into this camp as it helps move people from desktop to cloud. Lots of companies came before it, but when Microsoft—the undisputed leader in desktop computing—talked about the value of the cloud, people started adopting en masse.

The disruptor: the new upstart that’s challenging the way things are being done today. The truly credible ones do so while at the same time backing up their words with specific actions demonstrating their ability to deliver. That’s the “leadership” part of thought leadership. We normally think of Tesla in this vein, though time will tell whether the company can deliver on its promise of a mass-produced, affordable electric car.

The convener: this is the organization that steps forward and brings disparate groups together to solve a common problem. Convener must set aside their ego and put the cause before their own visibility—otherwise others won’t want to take up their mantle. An example here might be United Way, which serves to help convene organizations around solving hunger, poverty and other pressing social issues. But it also could be Apple (normally thought of as a “disruptor”), who is largely credited with helping solve the issue of digital rights management for the music and entertainment industry.

Having (and sharing) an opinion matters

Knowing what kind of thought leader you want to be is a start, but then you need the courage to express a strong point of view. Thought leaders have a vision that’s different than their peers, and they’re willing to express that vision even if it makes others (including their own customers and employees) uncomfortable. True thought leaders step outside of their industry norms to share their point of view on where the world, or the industry, or the category, or the consumer (you get the gist) is headed.

Can the market leader also be the thought leader? After all, thought leaders question the status quo, and market leaders are the status quo. They can, but it requires a willingness to question and strategically disrupt their own status quo. Thought leadership, at its core, is about change and transformation, and that doesn’t happen without a strong vision—and most importantly, sharing that vision beyond the walls of your organization.

And it means establishing a content and connectivity strategy that builds and grows your reputation as a true thought leader. No organization ever became a thought leader by keeping opinions to themselves.

Own it and act on it

Finally, you need to make a long-term commitment, acting in a manner that supports your thought-leadership platform. Thought leaders without actions are industry pretenders. Market leaders questioning their own status quo must take action to support their long-term vision, and disruptors need to show that they can consistently perform.

The truly remarkable companies convince stakeholders to believe in their view of where the world is going and their ability to deliver on that vision. That is thought leadership, and it’s a true competitive advantage for today’s best organizations.

Matt Kucharski is President of Padilla.

Your comms. strategy’s core

Your communications strategy needs to place thought leadership at its core.

Inoculating against bubble-think

Finally, don’t forget that success takes time, effort and patience. In the famous words of William Edward Hickson, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again.”

Darlene Doyle is Executive Vice President, Client Relations at PAN Communications.

Ken MacFadyen is Head of Content at BackBay Communications.

Content by committee

Meanwhile, your thought-leadership strategy must be cross-functional—embracing an integrated PR strategy.

Ken Deutsch is Head of Analytics & Research and Adam Pawluk is Senior Vice President at JPA Health Communications.

Matt Kucharski

By Matt Kucharski

Matt Kucharski is President of Padilla.
TOUCH
THE HEART
TO CHANGE
THE MIND.

There is no force that compares to the human heart.
Touch it, and an individual or an entire population can be moved to act.

For more than 40 years, we’ve created integrated communications programs that motivate positive behavior change, drive stronger outcomes, and build powerful brands. We call it Inspiring Actions That Matter.” What can we Inspire for you?

See our work for leading healthcare organizations, nonprofits, and federal agencies at crosbymarketing.com.
PR thrives amid tech’s wide net for innovation

The historic disruption affecting today's tech sector has resulted in a number of unlikely alliances in recent years, as a host of traditionally non-tech companies enter into a thriving market that shows no signs of slowing down. It’s also presented untold demand and opportunities for the communicators working within this landscape. O’Dwyer’s interviewed several executives at agencies representing tech clients on their strategies for growth in tech’s golden age and where they see the industry headed in a world where every PR agency is now a tech agency.

By Jon Gingerich

Calling tech an emerging market might offer a contender for understatement of the year. Digitization’s rise and subsequent consolidation, the technologicalization of just about everything, has resulted in countless cross-over opportunities for PR professionals working for tech-based businesses and clients, as a host of traditionally non-tech companies now enter an ever-widening market, signaling one of the most profound changes to hit the communications field in recent years.

The numbers speak for themselves. The top 10 PR firms ranked by O’Dwyer’s for technology this year brought in a combined total of nearly $466 million in tech-related fees in 2018, a 7.3 percent increase—or about $32 million—from last year’s $434 million. Eight of this year’s top 10 tech firms were up in total billings last year—four of them by double digits—and all save one gained in tech-related fees last year.

We asked several of the top PR firms representing the tech marketplace to weigh in on some of the advances and unlikely alliances they’ve experienced in today’s tech spaces, and what future changes we might expect in a world where tech seems to be everywhere.

Hotwire expands foothold, talent

Hotwire maintained its position as one of our top-ranked technology PR firms, gaining more than $3.6 million in tech-related net fees last year to take the number-two spot in O’Dwyer’s 2019 rankings of technology PR firms, with $36.8 million in 2018 tech-related billings, nearly three times what the New York-headquartered agency accounted for just three years before.

Hotwire President of North America Heather Kernahan told O’Dwyer’s that a continued expansion in North America played a sizeable role in the agency’s success, as did bolstering Hotwire’s capabilities in the areas of strategy, brand and marketing services and insights, as well as positioning the firm as a challenger brand that can attract the right team talent.

The U.S. and U.K.-based tech PR specialist also launched a series of pop-up offices across North America, with the agency’s downtown Minneapolis outpost adding five additional staff and anticipating to double its headcount by the end of this year. Kernahan said the pop-up office model allows the agency to enter new markets quickly and respond to customer requests while adding top talent across growing markets. The agency plans to open additional locations this year.

Kernahan noted that marketers today are taking more of a stand on high-stakes issues. A March report issued by the agency, which polled business decision makers, company marketing leaders and consumers to gauge opinions regarding the private sector’s handling of social matters, discovered that more than half of marketing leaders surveyed (61 percent) believe their organization should take a more proactive stance on tackling key high-stakes issues. Among CMOs and senior communications executives, 78 percent said high-stakes issue planning is at least as important as any other factor in their marketing and communications plans.

“The top issues for marketing leaders in the U.S. are immigration, mental health and sexual harassment,” Kernahan said. “These aren’t issues that would show up on the B2B priority list in the past, but the melding of B2B and B2C means there are fewer boundaries on issues.”

Kernahan also posited that strategy will gain importance in the months and years to come, as PR leaders have begun taking a stronger leadership position in brand strategy conversations, a trend Kernahan said she expects to continue.

“Communications professionals looking to grow their skills should seek learning opportunities in the areas of strategy and insights,” she said. “Those who can turn complex topics into simple-to-understand narratives will position themselves ahead in the field.”

ICR inches into top five

ICR gained more than $1.1 million in 2018 tech-related fees to total nearly $18.3 million in this practice area, joining O’Dwyer’s top five tech firms for the first time this year, up from the number-six slot last year ($17.1 million) and number-eight in 2017 ($12.7 million).

The New York-based agency, which staffs about 190 and is known for its financial communications and investor relations work, also gained nine percent overall to $69.1 million in total 2018 billings.

Partner Bo Park, who leads ICR’s tech, media and telecom practice, cited an ability to blend the agency’s Wall Street roots with traditional PR to engineer programs around its clients’ individual business models as key to its success.

“Leveraging that framework to anticipate the next stages of growth, we’re able to deliver a holistic story across audiences—from investors to customers, partners and employees—so that technology companies can enhance their profiles where it matters most,” Park told O’Dwyer’s.

Park cited multiple factors at play in the agency’s tech growth last year, including an increase in non-tech companies across industrial, retail, financial services and healthcare sectors now seeking to reinvent themselves as technology-driven enterprises. According to Park, companies sought ICR’s expertise to uncover their areas of

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Hotwire, 20
📍 Global

Pros:
– Presentable +1 at trade shows and conferences
– Work hard, play hard attitude
– Not the travel company

Cons:
– Very high standards
– Will make you second-guess your exes
– Not the travel company

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Welcome to the arena.

Where everyone with a phone is a reporter.
And fortunes can be lost over a single tweet.
ICR provides integrated communications for leaders who are focused on building and protecting the value of their businesses.
Financial PR firms weathered a rough 2018, which was Wall Street’s worst performance in a decade. The S&P 500 tumbled 6.2 percent. The Dow fell 5.6 percent. The NASDAQ declined 4.0.

In its December 31 financial wrap-up, CNN cited volatility driven by signs of an economic slowdown, worries over monetary policy, political dysfunction, inflation fears and potential regulation of the technology sector among reasons for Wall Street’s 2018 blues.

**APCO rides out storm**

The public affairs mindset of Washington-based APCO Worldwide helped it make the most out of a down year in the financial category as its fee income slipped 9.2 percent to $10.8 million.

Jeff Zelkowitz, head of APCO’s Global Financial Practice, said the firm’s PA orientation was most evident in its support for public sector financial oversight and economic development agencies, government ministries and central banks.

APCO handled projects “to ensure strong and transparent management of public sector finances, restructure debt, attract investment, strengthen public markets, and promote policies and reforms to create the foundations for sustainable economic growth,” according to Zelkowitz.

He views fintech as a growing category for both startups and established financial companies. “Data-fueled innovation is changing financial services, creating new benefits for consumers and markets also requiring agile communications and public affairs strategies,” said Zelkowitz.

He believes APCO’s integrated approach to communications, combining “financial subject matter expertise with an understanding of client strategies, stakeholder, policy and media landscape and data-driven insights on what impacts target audiences” is what differentiates the firm from its competitors.

**It’s the media that matters**

Richard Dukas of Dukas Linden PR, No. 7 on O’Dwyer’s rankings of financial firms, said his broadcast media team chalked up a solid 2018 with bookings on CNBC’s “Squawk Box” and “Closing Bell,” Fox Business Network’s “Mornings with Maria” and PBS’ “Nightly Business Report”.

On behalf of Ark Invest, DLPR cashed in on the media and investment community’s intense interest in Tesla boss Elon Musk. Ark Invest is the ETF industry’s second biggest shareholder of Tesla. Following Musk’s claim in August that he had a deal to take Tesla private for $460 per-share, Cathie Wood, Ark’s Chief Investment Officer, tweeted an open letter to Musk urging him against the go-private deal.

The Tesla chief responded to Wood directly, setting the tone for significant coverage speculating on the wisdom—or lack thereof—of such action.

“Wood appeared on the major financial broadcast cable networks 16 times in August, to offer expert commentary on Tesla,” said Dukas. “Her unwavering support likely was key to the strength of Tesla’s stock, despite Musk’s antics.”

DLPR notched a 1.9 percent gain in 2018 financial fees to $5.4 million.

**New faces, accounts at Vested**

Vested, No. 5 on the financial list, chalked up a 17.7 percent rise in 2018 fees to $7.3 million.

Binna Kim, President, said recruitment and client wins highlighted the performance.

In January, Vested opened its London office and hired Elspeth Rothwell as CEO and Katie Spreadbury as Director.

In the U.S., the firm added PR veteran Amber Roberts to its team as CEO of professional services, and Kevin Trowbridge as Chief Technology Officer and the lead developer of the firm’s proprietary tech platform Qouted.

In early 2019, Vested brought on Christina Bertinelli, formerly of Lumentus, as Managing Director to help further the agency’s digital capabilities.

On the client front, Vested picked up Boston Private, which provides wealth management, trust, and private banking to clients.

Kim said Vested helped Boston Private receive top-tier coverage for its “Why of Wealth” campaign, including a feature in the New York Times money column and coverage on Business Insider and CNBC.

The firm also added digital assets leader DCG/Grayscale/Genesis; real estate investment tech platform Roofstock; and the wealth management firm Bailard.

**Finn names first financial head**

Finn Partners, which posted a 19.1 percent jump in financial income to $2.5 million, named Ryan Barr its first global financial services head.

His mission is to drive “successful business outcomes for its clients through purposeful storytelling and integrated communications programs.”

Finn’s financial unit, which recently acquired Moorgate Communications in London, added a roster of financial pros including Robert Kelsey, Athanasia Sifakis, Pete Johnson, Beth Weine, Liz Nardozza and Rachel Neff to its team.

They serve long-standing clients such as Commerzbank, Deutsche Bank, Regions Bank and S&P Global as well as new engagements with BNY Mellon, Cetera Financial Group and First Interstate Bank.

“Technological advancements have turned every consumer, partner and employee into a real-time brand advocate and influencer,” said Barr. “We work with our clients to identify the most meaningful way to engage key audiences and inspire action.”

**Bliss packages complex ideas into integrated PR**

Financial PR, which accounts for 36 percent of overall revenues, is the No. 1 practice at Bliss Integrated Communications.

“We work with some of the biggest names in asset management, insurance, wealth...
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Building Brands | Driving Growth

Content-driven Integrated PR and Marketing for Financial Services Companies

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Constant change is new normal in healthcare

A series of recent technological innovations and the rise of a consumer-driven healthcare ecosystem has transformed the health and life sciences communications landscape, introducing a host of new possibilities for professionals working in the field, and new challenges as well.

Keep up with the constantly shifting goalposts in the healthcare industry over the past year has required communications firms working in the sector to stay abreast of seemingly constant social and technological change.

Those social changes are primarily a result of the growing role patients are now playing in how healthcare is delivered.

“Empowered patients are no longer outliers—they’re here to stay,” said W2O Practice Leader, Earned and Social Media Jennifer Paganelli. “Patients bring a unique, authentic ability to connect and inspire that a traditional press release will never rival.”

Paganelli noted that healthcare firms are bringing patient groups into the process at a much earlier point than they once did, making patient points of view a central part of their communications efforts. She said this trend will grow in the years to come, eventually becoming standard practice for healthcare communications practitioners.

Michael Roth, who leads of Bliss Integrated Communication’s healthcare practice, added that “patients are transforming business and getting what they want, and healthcare businesses are getting smarter about delivering what patients need.”

Roth cited the rare disease space as a prime example of how patient activism is having a big effect. “Many rare diseases have small but mighty advocates who testify at FDA hearings to ensure regulators consider not just the scientific innovation of a new treatment option but the full patient experience too,” he said.

Roth also pointed to another factor in the equation: the emergence of the “empathetic client,” or healthcare practitioners who are beginning to listen to what patients have to say.

Spectrum President Michelle Gross said this trend is part of a move away from “seeing healthcare providers as the sole decision maker when it comes to treatment and prescription decisions.”

The increasing importance of patient concerns has opened up new avenues for healthcare communicators in a few ways. “We’re seeing direct-to-consumer marketing efforts at major companies are moving the needle for the better,” said Paganelli. “These efforts were happening behind the scenes in many instances, but now are front and center.”

When it comes to technological change, artificial intelligence, telemedicine and electronic health records are all drivers of a changing relationship between healthcare communications providers and audiences, according to Roth.

He noted that each generation of healthcare consumers requires its own set of communications priorities. “While a Millennial may go to extensive lengths to avoid an in-person doctor’s visit in favor of a virtual check-in,” he said that Boomers may be more hesitant about putting their trust in technology and senior citizens may see the human-to-human contact of a doctor’s visit as a way to stave off loneliness.

Spectrum Chief Innovation Officer Rob Oquendo also pointed out the role technology is playing the tailoring of messages to a range of audiences. “Technology is enabling a paradigm shift from sharing content to establishing one-on-one conversations,” he said. “Healthcare communicators need to start thinking about how to leverage messaging platforms to reach audiences, whether it’s text, voice or bots leveraging AI.”

Paganelli said that “technology is democratizing access to data.” Using machine learning and AI to “make sense of the massive amounts of public social data,” Paganelli believes communicators can uncover consumer concerns and nuances of opinion to produce more targeted, insightful communications.

In addition, possible regulatory and legislative developments could provide a boost. “If certain proposals to update HIPAA and current innovation-first programs at the FDA remain, I see greater opportunity.

Engaging with your audiences should never be dull. We can help you cut through the chaos to connect where it matters most.

Start a new conversation.
Financial roundup

Continued from page 28

management, banking and private equity and have expertise in reaching niche audiences, including regulators, advisors, intermediaries, institutional investors, business owners, consumers, millennials, women, mass affluent, and high-net-worth investors,” said Meg Wildrick, Managing Partner.

Bliss, which ranked No. 9 on O’Dwyer’s financial list with $3.9 million in fees, takes pride in its ability to break down complex ideas and packaging them into integrated communications campaigns.

Wildrick said the firm’s 25 financial staffers “know the issues, audiences, influencers and media that matter to B2B and B2C financial services clients — and push themselves to stay ahead of emerging trends in fintech, regtech, financial wellness, wealth management, payments and cybersecurity.”

Become tech-wise or capsize

In the aftermath of the economic crisis a decade ago, the most resilient companies learned they would either become tech-wise or capsize, according to Steve Halsey, managing director, business consulting at G&S Business Communications.

G&S collaborated with financial services and fintech clients on a significant number of tech-driven business transformations that prompted the need for strategic brand repositionings, new brand architectures and visual assets, and stakeholder engagement across paid, earned, owned and shared media.

Halsey said the firm is poised to detect and address changes in consumer and business relationships with financial institutions — many of which are the result of new generational preferences and the rapid adoption of technology in decision making.

G&S, which ranked No. 12 on O’Dwyer’s financial list with $2.9 million in fees, strives to unlock value for fledgling fintech companies as they achieve scale, seek new routes to market, and encounter pressure from competitors, regulators, legislators or suppliers.

“It’s an exciting time to be a business communications agency because our action-inspiring strategies can be tailored for a wide range of organizations, from global businesses to emerging ventures,” he said.

Technology roundup

Continued from page 24

innovation, build compelling storylines and amplify those key messages in a bid to reposition their corporate brands.

Park said her agency has also noticed “furious” development in areas such as AI and blockchain disrupting segments in supply chains, infrastructure and enterprise, with emerging brands now seeking to incorporate PR into their marketing mix in an effort to showcase their solutions to prospects, while simultaneously seeking IR guidance as they enter the next stage.

Finally, Park said ICR expanded its focus in autonomous driving and connected cars, particularly in global markets, and saw an increase in alternative IPO activities, including RegA+ offerings and Special Purpose Acquisition Corp.

“We expect to see these trends continuing to grow and taking even bigger shape this year and next,” she said.

PAN puts emphasis on ‘X-tech’

Boston-based PAN took the number-seven position in O’Dwyer’s tech rankings this year, clearing more than $17.3 million in 2018 tech-related net fees, an uptick of more than $2.2 million that reveals an ongoing climb from the agency’s number-eight spot last year (or $15 million in 2017 billings) and number-nine position in 2017, or $11.7 million.

Philip A. Nardone Jr., President and CEO of the tech and healthcare specialists, told O’Dwyer’s that no single factor could be attributed to the firm’s forward mobility and instead cited a combined effort across the board from its PR, marketing, HR and finance teams, as well as a recent expansion of PAN’s executive team which resulted in the firm’s highest retention rates to date, allowing the agency to focus its time and energy on meeting customer demands.

“Our growth in the technology sector specifically was two-fold. We have a strong pipeline of emerging and enterprise tech brands looking for integrated offerings, and they’re leaning on mid-sized agencies like PAN because of our ability to meet their needs on a global scale, while continuing to deliver personalized service,” Nardone said.

Nardone noted that the second factor contributing to its growth comes from what he referred to as “X-tech,” industry disruptors currently causing headwinds in today’s tech market. “We’re seeing more and more inbound requests from AI-tech, insurance tech, real estate tech, etc., brands that are earning attention from investors and need PR and marketing services to support. That’s an area we look forward to expanding in 2019,” he said.

Healthcare roundup

Continued from page 32

in healthcare for companies—and their investors—that can address priority and unmet patient needs through these pathways,” said Roth.

“With the 2018 FDA guidance on patient-focused drug development,” said Spectrum’s Gross, “we’ll see clinical trials—and what is said about the drugs resulting from them—become more reflective of the patient experience and more attuned with what the patient is looking for.”

However, in a sector marked by mergers and focused on new technologies, audiences and suppliers, communications basics—and a firm knowledge of what your firm can and can’t do—is still seen as fundamental to success in the sector.

“Massive integration means that everyone does everything,” said Roth. “Clients may be confused by agency offerings and assume you have experience in areas where you simply don’t have experience.”

W2O’s Paganelli emphasizes that practitioners still need “well-rounded, 360-degree understanding of the paid, earned and shared tools in our arsenal and how to deploy them appropriately to reach our key audience where they are going for information in the format they want to receive it in.”

REPORT

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let’s make health more human™

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Pleased to be ranked among the top 10 global healthcare PR firms by O’Dwyers

Let’s chat.
Maryellen Royle, president PR & Influence
+1 215 928 2368 | maryellen.royle@evokegroup.com
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<td>24. Public Communications Inc., Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>62. IW Group, Inc., West Hollywood, CA</td>
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<td>25. rbb Communications, Miami, FL</td>
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<td>26. Hunter PR, New York, NY</td>
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<td>67. Fish Consulting, Fort Lauderdale, FL</td>
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<td>30. Matter Communications, Newburyport, MA</td>
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<td>34. Racepoint Global, Boston, MA</td>
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<td>73. Hollywood Agency, Hingham, MA</td>
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<td>36. Rasky Partners, Inc., Boston, MA</td>
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<td>74. O’Malley Hansen Communications, Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>37. Tunheim, Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>75. SPM Communications, Dallas, TX</td>
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<td>38. Kivvit, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1,483,874</td>
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LaVoieHealthScience
Strategic Communications

18
Years in Business

50+
IR/PR Awards

300+
Communications Plans

18%
Integrated Service Growth Year Over Year

We Help To Advance Health & Science Innovations

Contact: Sharon Choe, Senior Vice President of Investor Relations and Business Development
One Thompson Square, Suite 503 • Boston, MA 02129 • o: 617.374.8800 • c: 917-945-2068
schoe@lavoiehealthscience.com • www.lavoiehealthscience.com
### Rankings of PR Firms Specializing in Agriculture

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
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<td>West</td>
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<td>4. Padilla</td>
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<td>7. Standing Partnership</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
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<td>$215,706</td>
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<td>11. Trevelino/Keller</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Landis Communications</td>
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### Rankings of PR Firms Specializing in Beauty & Fashion

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<td>West</td>
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<td>4. Zeno Group</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. 5W Public Relations</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$4,500,000</td>
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<td>6. Turner, a Fahlgren Mortine company</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$3,274,784</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Coyne PR</td>
<td>Parsippany, NJ</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. LaunchSquad</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$1,382,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Havas Formula</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<td>13. Hunter PR</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<td>14. SPM Communications</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
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<td>15. O’Malley Hansen Communications</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>16. Zapwater Communications</td>
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<td>17. Hollywood Agency</td>
<td>Hingham, MA</td>
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<td>19. Konnect Agency</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21. IW Group, Inc.</td>
<td>West Hollywood, CA</td>
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<td>22. Padilla</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. BoardroomPR, Ft. Lauderdale, FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. J Public Relations</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<td>25. rbb Communications</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td>$22,038</td>
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<td>26. Maccabee</td>
<td>Minneapolis, MN</td>
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### Rankings of PR Firms Specializing in Home Furnishings

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<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
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<td>1. G&amp;S Business Communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Citizen Relations</td>
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<td>3. Zimmerman Agency</td>
<td>Tallahassee, FL</td>
<td>$3,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Edelman</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$3,274,000</td>
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<td>5. L.C. Williams &amp; Associates</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>6. Coyne PR</td>
<td>Parsippany, NJ</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
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<td>7. Jackson Spalding</td>
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<td>8. 5W Public Relations</td>
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<td>9. Havas Formula</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<td>11. Hunter PR</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Pierpont Communications</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
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<td>13. rbb Communications</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
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<td>West</td>
<td>Vaughan</td>
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<td>21. Berk Communications, New York, NY</td>
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<td>27. Tunheim, Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>36. Public Communications Inc., Chicago, IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>39. Havas Formula, New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Judge Public Relations, LLC, Tampa, FL</td>
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RANKINGS OF PR FIRMS SPECIALIZING IN ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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<tr>
<td>3. Davies, Santa Barbara, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Finn Partners, New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Singer Associates, Inc., San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>5,238,460</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Cerrell Associates, Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>3,751,386</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Perry Communications Group, Inc., Sacramento, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Pierpont Communications, Houston, TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Lambert, Grand Rapids, MI</td>
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<td>10. SevenTwenty Strategies, LLC, Washington, DC</td>
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<td>11. Padilla, Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>12. Zeno Group, New York, NY</td>
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<td>13. Citizen Relations, Los Angeles, CA</td>
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<td>19. Landis Communications, San Francisco, CA</td>
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<td>26. Beehive Strategic Communication, St. Paul, MN</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Fish Consulting, Fort Lauderdale, FL</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
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<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
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<td>6. Infinite Global, New York, NY</td>
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<td>33. The Hoyt Organization Inc., Torrance, CA</td>
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<td>8. Bliss Integrated Comm, New York, NY</td>
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<td>35. Standing Partnership, St. Louis, MO</td>
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<td>9. rbb Communications, Miami, FL</td>
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<td>36. Marketing Maven PR, Camarillo, CA</td>
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<td>37. WordWrite Comms LLC, Pittsburgh, PA</td>
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<td>14. Zeno Group, New York, NY</td>
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<td>257,231</td>
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<td>Vaughan, Raleigh, NC</td>
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Data reigns as PR faces future market volatility

The challenge to provide definitive metrics that measure the reach, target and value of campaign efforts increasingly scattered across audiences and media channels arises as an overarching theme for the top-ranked firms in O’Dwyer’s 2019 Rankings of PR Firms.

By Jon Gingerich and Kevin McCauley

As the traditional ad marketplace starts to transform and evolve, in some cases dévelop, the rise of digital and data to develop insights and micro-targeted messages has become very important to our clients and is another space where we’re making a big investment and doing a lot of work,” Krause said.

Uncertainty drive APCO’s bottom line

Number-three firm APCO Worldwide took in $134.1 million, revealing a four-per-cent gain from last year’s $128.2 million.

As President and Managing Director of Operations Evan Krause explained, the unusually high level of political uncertainty in the world today places undue pressure on boardrooms and C-suites to address enterprise risk and reputation, which bodes well for firms with skin in the public affairs game.

“The world is continuing to transform itself rapidly, and the amount of change happening only seems to be accelerating,” Krause said. “When change breeds uncertainty in the market, people tend to want to work with us more, as public affairs remains at the root of our heritage.”

Krause said the D.C.-based government relations giant has experienced healthy growth in Europe and Asia, but has noticed particular activity in the Middle East, where some countries in that region are now trying to communicate more aggressively about what they’re doing for the first time in an effort to diversify their economies, which has resulted in a great deal of market-entry work.

Finally, Krause said APCO recently partnered with other agencies to launch a new research model that addresses corporate agility in the market and the factors that drive agility, services for which the agency has seen increased demand.

“As the traditional ad marketplace begins to transform and evolve, in some cases, the rise of digital and data to develop insights and micro-targeted messages has become very important to our clients and is another space where we’re making a big investment and doing a lot of work,” Krause said.

Business wins, acquisitions boost Finn

During 2018, Finn Partners acquired MFA, a New York sports marketing, travel, lifestyle and consumer firm and later, picked up CatchOn, a PR and digital marketing agency that brought new offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai, and added depth in travel, lifestyle and health and wellness.

That acquisition drive continued into 2019 with the purchase of Small Army, a Boston-based digital storytelling agency and the addition of Moorgate Communications in London, a financial services specialist firm. The firm also stepped up its hiring, adding 34 staffers during the past 13 months.

“Our commitment to be a world-class, best-place-to-work global agency, with a heart and a conscience, was core to our growth in 2018,” said Founding Partner Peter Finn. “Our growth during the first quarter of 2019 has been unprecedented, especially in terms of new business as we have won significant accounts in health, technology, sustainability, education, travel and other sectors. When combined with our two acquisitions this year, we’re on a path that will deliver stronger growth this year than in 2018.”

Zeno keeps rolling along

Zeno CEO Barby Siegel noted that 2018 marked the ninth consecutive year of double-digit growth for the firm. It was up 17 percent in the U.S. and 13.6 percent overseas.

More than half (54 percent) of Zeno’s revenues stemmed from multinational sources, up from 46 percent in 2017.

She said Zeno increasingly works at the intersection of communications and business impact with purposeful work that generates real and measurable business outcomes.

“While innovation is at the heart of the firm, we continue to invest in our core competency of earned media relations...
STAY CURIOUS. STAY AHEAD.

APCO Worldwide is an advisory and advocacy communications consultancy helping public and private sector organizations act with agility, and build organizational reputations, brands, relationships and solutions to succeed. Most importantly, we are a trusted partner to our clients. We help them anticipate, plan, execute and secure impact through our curiosity, insights and diverse expertise. Let us help you turn curiosity into success.
It’s crucial when credibility is questioned.

It’s the best insurance against competitive disruption and consumer indifference.

It’s what our 6000 experts help companies and brands earn every day.
while pushing forward into new and rapidly-evolving spaces such as paid social, owned newsrooms, data-driven story-telling and content developed specifically to optimize search,” said Siegel.

As Zeno grows and evolves, it strives to keep its soul, according to Siegel. “We continually reinforce core values that are non-negotiable—fearless, collaborative, committed, true to our word and human,” she said.

**Ruder Finn returns**

After not appearing in O'Dwyer’s rankings for several years, Ruder Finn was one of the firms—along with fellow Top 10 agency MWWPR—to return this year for the #7 spot, at $69.1 million.

CEO Kathy Bloomgarden said 2018 was a year of immense investment and growth for the agency. RF furthered efforts to reinvent its business while sustaining its creating underpinnings and reinforcing its technological capabilities with new digital, social and analytics offerings. In the process, the agency won more than 30 new clients across consumer, corporate, and technology and partnered with existing clients to grow assignments into campaigns that magnified impact. RF also added senior talent, including four executive vice presidents in its New York office.

Finally, RF acquired RLA Collective in the U.S. to expand its integrated marketing and analytics expertise.

“We are proud of the excellent momentum we achieved last year and in the first quarter of this year and are excited to continue our journey as a leader in leveraging new tools and capabilities to further our activities on behalf of our clients,” Bloomgarden said.

**Prosek picks up pace**

New York-based Prosek Partners revealed another year of solid growth, following 2017’s big 33 percent gains with 15.1 percent additional growth in 2018 to take O’Dwyer’s #8 spot with $46.9 million.

Jennifer Prosek, Managing Partner of the financial, healthcare and professional services shop, told O’Dwyer’s that she predicted years ago that the financial services sector would one day “wake up and smell the marketing.” Prosek announced that day has finally come.

Prosek also said the agency’s special situations work has been a particular source of growth, and will inevitably increase as markets get more volatile. She expects PR and marketing spends to slow naturally a bit alongside a slower growth economy, but sees promising emerging growth opportunities in the areas of culture, recruiting, D&I, employee engagement and special situations work.

“I believe the industry will continue to benefit as companies seek to grow and protect their corporate brands, prioritize their employees and corporate culture, and grapple with change.”

**5W PR posts 17.7% across-the-board gain**

5W Public Relations CEO Ronn Torossian said his New York-based firm’s 17.7 percent gain in fee income to $32.4 million came from across its practice areas.

As a PR innovator, 5W launched a CBD (cannabidiol) specialty team, a practice focused on providing strategy and media relations services in the gaming and sports gambling industry, and expanded its fintech specialty.

The firm added staff to its corporate, technology, consumer and digital teams.

“We won consumer, corporate and fast-growing technology companies and do great work for them,” said Torossian.

**Big agency sales mark 2018**

Minneapolis-based Padilla grew three percent to round out O’Dwyer’s top 10 with $41.2 million in 2018 net fees.

But the most significant change to affect the agency last year involved its acquisition by Avenir Global, a Montreal-based holding company of PR and communication firms.

Padilla President Matt Kucharski told O’Dwyer’s that move provided the agency’s clients and staff with access to global resources while allowing it to remain independently operated. Throughout the transition, Padilla remained focused on delivering strategic work for new and existing clients, which Kucharski said is reflected in the agency’s top-line growth.

“We are energized by that in 2019, with efforts underway to help clients reach their objectives through content and connection strategy, engagement and thought leadership, and much more.”

Health, life sciences and public affairs firm Spectrum (#13) gained more than any other agency in O’Dwyer’s top 25, up 37.1 percent to $32.9 million.

President Michelle Gross said Spectrum earned its top gainer spot because “we renewed our focus on clients and increased capabilities in key areas to ensure we are delivering best-in-class interwoven programs in the evolving communications landscape.”

In 2018, Spectrum saw the ahead-of-schedule completion of its sale to CEO Jonathan Wilson and established a new framework around four key pillars: strategy, engagement, innovation and creative.

The firm reorganized leadership into a new strategy council consisting of Wilson, Gross, Rob Oquendo (Chief Innovation Officer), Michelle Strier (Chief Strategy Officer), Scott Chesson (COO) and Jon Higgins (Chief Engagement Officer).

Gross said Spectrum is positioned to take on the future of health and science communications—a space where it sees the overlap between marketing and communications disciplines expanding and the importance of taking a science-first perspective.

“As we move beyond simply integrated teams to interwoven client-centric teams—with our scientists, creatives, media specialists and account teams working in lockstep to deliver for clients every day and setting the agency model of the future—our uncompromising focus on client service and strategy rooted in science and innovation remain unchanged,” she said.

G&S Business Communications grew 11.8 percent in 2018 to $30.4 million, taking O’Dwyer’s #15 spot. Notably, the business communications firm more than doubled
WHAT’S IN OUR MIX? GLOBAL TEAM, INTEGRATED RESEARCH, CREATIVE, PR AND MARKETING FOR SATISFYING RESULTS


MORE AT FINNPARTNERS.COM
O'Dwyer's rankings  
Continued from page 46

its New York fee income and broadened its roster of accounts last year when it acquired CooperKatz & Co.

G&S CEO Luke Lambert told O'Dwyer's that the agency owes its success to the relationships it has nurtured within the agency as well as its long-standing client engagements, many of which have spanned decades and multiple generations of communication teams.

"G&S also leverages a unique business communications approach that helps clients address their evolving markets—ones in which more decisions are made within tech-disrupted workplaces and homes—by shaping strategies informed by insights and enhanced by creativity," Lambert said.

Columbus, OH's Fahlgren Mortine gained 8.9 percent last year to nearly $30 million in 2018 billings, taking O'Dwyer's #17 position.

President and CEO Neil Mortine told O'Dwyer's that FM saw record revenue in 2018 after implementing the fastest and largest volume of change in the company's 57-year history. The agency transitioned ownership when it was acquired by Memphis, TN-based holding company Eastport Holdings, LLC and, several months later, consolidated staff and clients when it merged with fellow Eastport property and Columbus-based ad shop SBC Advertising.

The agency also strengthened its vertical industry expertise as a top-five ranked travel and tourism firm through an affiliation with tourism research consultancy Longwoods International and entrenched its position as one of the nation's leading business-to-business firms by winning several blue-chip clients and hosting a B2B Peer Summit.

"Despite starting the year without our largest client of 40 years in McDonald's following a consolidation of U.S. agencies, Fahlgren Mortine not only replaced that lost revenue, but achieved double-digit growth in revenue and operating profit. In addition to our financial performance, Fahlgren Mortine maintained high satisfaction and net promoter scores among clients and low voluntary attrition among our associates," he said.

Mortine said both the near- and long-term future of PR rests on growth in the use of performance analytics and an ongoing blurring of the lines between traditional marketing and communications. Clients today demand more definitive metrics that go beyond the traditional measures of reach, frequency, target impressions and key messaging delivery, Mortine said, and want measured the relative value and ROI of engaging the right target with the right media mix.

"For an integrated communications company like Fahlgren Mortine, clients are seeking holistic solutions to their business problems. Clients understand that achieving their business goals depends on the right mix of PR, advertising, digital and social strategies. There's an overwhelming choice in communications vehicles, and clients simply don't know where to invest and how it all works seamlessly together. The best agencies connect the dots for their clients to optimize success."

Imre, the number-two leading gainer in O'Dwyer's top 25 (up 34.3 percent to #24), attributed a portion of its 34.3 percent gains to a "ferociously independent business model that clients find attractive when seeking an agency partner."

In 2018, Imre acquired Los Angeles-based JMPR, which has more than 40 years of experience in the automotive sector. That deal "helped us bolster our integrated approach for clients and we expect to see that addition continue to support our growth in 2019 and beyond," said agency Founder and CEO Dave Imre.

Noting that the shop has hired people with diverse backgrounds, Imre also said, "We've especially doubled down on strategy to bring more true human insights to the table. And we've also seen the industry renew its creative focus on leading with ideas, followed by technology, which we've always done. The best ideas resonate with people and we've often seen them attract a lot of earned media as a result."

Lambert grew by a whopping 32.1 percent in 2018 to $10 million in net fees (up from 2017's $7.6 million), taking O'Dwyer's #45 position this year and surging from their #54 spot in last year's rankings. The Detroit-based firm gained noticeable size in 2018 when it acquired financial PR powerhouse Owen Blicksilver PR in a move into the New York market.

CEO Jeffrey Lambert said the firm, formerly known as Lambert, Edwards & Assoc., attributed its double-digit increase to "a cocktail of organic and acquisition growth mixed with integrated marketing and multimedia expansion," adding that Lambert's current goal is to make another acquisition this year and launch a new practice area "to keep the momentum rolling."

“We are moving into the age of accountability and from being professional communicators to business consultants as our work impacts not just awareness and influence, but outcomes and sales," Lambert said. “This requires new talent on our teams, a wholistic approach to marketing with PR as the lead but not the only silver-bullet strategy, deeper analytics expertise and boardroom acumen. Unfortunately, this will only widen the gap between the smaller agencies and the mid-sized and larger firms who are willing and able to invest in the human and technology capital to compete. We believe the best way to accomplish this is through a combination of organic practice start-ups and adjacent service acquisitions and believe the scale and agility mix of mid-sized firms like ours will be a competitive advantage.”

Health Unlimited, Racepoint plan for rebound

Following a 6.6 percent dip in fee income to $24.3 million last year, Health Unlimited CEO Tim Bird said his firm entered 2019 with a solid base of growing clients and is positioned for growth with expansion or capabilities and presence.

“We are extremely proud that two of our signature campaigns, MyHealthysexual Story and Speak Your Migraine, were recognized by our peers and shortlisted by several industry awards for creativity and impact,” said Bird.

The global health consultancy and communications agency strengthened creative and digital engagement capabilities with senior leadership hires. Health Unlimited has also embraced the philosophy of being Fluent in HUman, aligned with our core purpose to create a meaningful change in health, said Bird. “We have renewed our commitment to training and development...
We work everyday to make healthcare better.

Join Us.

jarrardinc.com/join-our-team

JARRARD
PHILLIPS CATE & HANCOCK

Strategic communications consulting devoted to healthcare

★ NASHVILLE ★ CHICAGO
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O'DWYER'S RANKINGS OF PR FIRMS WITH MAJOR U.S. OPERATIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Employees</th>
<th>% Change from 2017</th>
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<td>67. Public Communications Inc., Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>123. Bianchi Public Relations, Troy, MI</td>
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<td>130. Stuntman PR, New York, NY</td>
<td>481,585</td>
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<td>131. Novitas Communications, Denver, CO</td>
<td>383,441</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
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</table>
initiatives, as well as our commitment to diversity and inclusion, which has already resulted in a significant increase in a more diverse and aware workforce," he added.

Boston’s Racepoint Global experienced key client losses in 2018, including its long-standing relationships of seven and nine years with AT&T and IBM, respectively. Fee income for the technology, B2B and healthcare shop dropped 16.8 percent to $20.9 million.

Chairman Larry Weber stepped into the CEO role in the second half of 2018 to help reposition the agency and double down on its focus on earned media for B2B, technology and healthcare brands.

“Racepoint has started 2019 off strong, exceeding Q1 growth targets, and we are optimistic about the year ahead,” Weber told O’Dwyer’s.

Double-digit gains exceed expectations

The top 50 firms in O’Dwyer’s rankings this year registered a total 14.1 percent gain in income to $2.4 billion and a 13.3 percent rise in employment to 12,048.

Chicago-based tech and professional services firm Walker Sands Communications grew more than any agency in O’Dwyer’s top 50 this year, surging an unbelievable 62.3 percent to $14.1 million in net fees and now taking our #36 slot, a major leap from the firm’s #49 position last year.

“Walker Sands has achieved incredible growth over the last several years because of our focus in the growing niche of B2B tech and effectively integrating public relations and digital marketing,” said President Mike Santoro. “But more than anything, it’s our reputation for achieving real, measurable results for our clients that has compounded our momentum. We’ve been fortunate to work with some of the biggest players in the industry, and it’s been incredibly rewarding to grow alongside them as they continue to rely on Walker Sands for smart programs with impact that matters.”

Crisis and professional services specialist Infinite Global (#55) posted an 18.6 percent surge in fee income to $8.1 million last year.

CEO Jamie Diaferia reported that the agency “exceeded our ambitious expectations by hitting three key metrics: at least 15 percent growth (with a cap of 20 percent to make sure we don’t exceed our ability to hire responsibly); a minimum of 20 percent profit margin; and 50-55 percent staff costs,” he explained.

Diaferia focused on four primary drivers: diversifying services, investing in marketing generating more revenue from existing clients, and limiting staff and client turnover.

He said Infinite Global has hit every goal in the seven-year growth plan that it established in 2015. "It’s gratifying to watch the company hitting on all cylinders across the U.S. and U.K.,” he said.

San Francisco-based Singer Associates grew by an impressive 47.9 percent in 2018 to nearly $7.7 million in net fees, taking O’Dwyer’s #58 spot this year, a sizeable jump from their #66 position last year ($5.2 million).

President Sam Singer cited two factors as responsible for driving the agency’s growth: a senior staff with deep experience and growing markets in sectors for which the agency specializes.

“Clients are willing to pay a premium to get senior, experienced communications consultants. They are seeking out agencies that possess strategic thinking and have senior players who can implement those strategies,” Singer told O’Dwyer’s. “Clients, now more than ever, desire and demand local, regional and state knowledge and in-the-trenches experience. The future of public relations and communications is bright for agencies that possess experienced staff with strong local connections and knowledge of issues, regulatory agencies, elected and business and community groups.”

O’Dwyer’s rankings

Nearly two-dozen firms joined O’Dwyer’s rankings this year. Among the new additions were Berk Communications (#78, $3.4 million, up 30.9 percent), Buchanan Public Relations (#109, $1.5 million, up 3.4 percent), Buttonwood Communications Group (#114, $1.3 million, up 48.8 percent), Caliber Corporate Advisers (#90, $2.7 million, up 72 percent), Citizen Relations (#12, $34 million, up 10.7 percent), CommCentric Solutions (#121, $995,000, up 11 percent), Crenshaw Communications (#97, $2.2 million, up 23 percent), The Dana Agency (#120, $1 million, up 7.8 percent), Havas Formula (#23, $22.3 million, up 11.6 percent), KCD PR (#119, $1 million, up 40.7 percent), Kohnstamm Communications (#96, $2.3 million, up 11 percent), Regan Communications Group (#30, $18.5 million, up 13.6 percent), Sam Brown Inc. (#63, $5.6 million, up 17.1 percent), SevenTwenty Strategies (#75, $4 million, up 21.5 percent), SPI Group (#68, $5.1 million, down 5.7 percent), Touchdown PR (#73, $4.1 million, down 2.5 percent) and Zapwater Communications (#89, $2.8 million, up 14.3 percent), among others.

One such newcomer, Tampa’s Judge Public Relations (#128, $629,654), entered O’Dwyer’s rankings to reveal 2018 growth of 76.1 percent, the largest single gains counted among any of the 130 firms listed this year.

President James P. Judge posited that as an industry, the PR profession is uniquely poised to educate the public regarding the importance of communications and shifting the mindset that PR is a practice reserved solely for crises. While most businesses today understand the need for accountants and attorneys, Judge noted that many don’t consider reputation to carry the same importance, and said it’s the job of professionals working within the field to change that.

“As demand for media increases at a staggering rate and attention spans continue to grow shorter, audiences have become immune to the trite talking points and key messages, which are spit out by many PR and marketing professionals,” Judge said. “As a result, we have to be more creative than ever to break through the noise and grab attention, while ensuring we continue to fact-check and maintain our credibility. I see the demand for PR professionals continuing to increase, as technology makes communication faster.”

O’Dwyer’s rankings of firms by region, pg. 54

Jamie Diaferia

Larry Weber

Mike Santoro

Sam Singer

O’Dwyer’s rankings of firms by region, pg. 54

James P. Judge
## LEADING GAINERS AMONG PR FIRMS

**Firms in the top 25** (representing fees from $20.8M to $888M)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Employees</th>
<th>% Change from 2017</th>
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<td>1. Spectrum, Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>$32,900,000</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>+37.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. IMRE, Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>$21,940,000</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>+34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. W2O Group, San Francisco</td>
<td>$177,569,000</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>+23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 5W PR, New York, NY</td>
<td>$32,410,427</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>+17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. French</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Vaughan, Raleigh, NC</td>
<td>$29,280,490</td>
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<td>6. Prosek Partners, New York, NY</td>
<td>$46,994,360</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>+15.1</td>
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<td>7. Zeno Group, New York, NY</td>
<td>$73,373,239</td>
<td>481</td>
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<td>8. G&amp;S Business Comms., New York, NY</td>
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<td>9. Havas Formula, New York, NY</td>
<td>$22,324,063</td>
<td>130</td>
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<td>10. Hotwire, New York, NY</td>
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<td>264</td>
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**Firms ranked 26 through 50** (representing fees from $9.5M to $20.6M)

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<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
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<th>% Change from 2017</th>
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<td>1. Walker Sands Communications, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>$14,116,410</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>+62.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Crosby, Annapolis, MD</td>
<td>$20,693,661</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+36.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Lambert, Grand Rapids, MI</td>
<td>$10,055,000</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>+32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. JeffreyGroup, Miami, FL</td>
<td>$9,975,712</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>+22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. rbb Communications, Miami, FL</td>
<td>$13,552,882</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>+18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. MP&amp;F Strategic Communications, Nashville, TN</td>
<td>$9,541,632</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>+17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. J Public Relations, New York, NY</td>
<td>$10,632,135</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>+17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 360PR+, Boston, MA</td>
<td>$9,738,953</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>+16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Firms ranked 51 through 100** (representing fees from $2.1M to $9.3M)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Employees</th>
<th>% Change from 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Caliber Corporate Advisers, New York, NY</td>
<td>$2,729,690</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Singer Associates, Inc., San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$7,690,997</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ARPR, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>$2,362,442</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perry Communications Group, Inc., Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>$2,701,296</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Berk Communications, New York, NY</td>
<td>$3,455,600</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>+30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Crenshaw Communications, New York, NY</td>
<td>$2,280,188</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Vested, New York, NY</td>
<td>$7,268,000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SevenTwenty Strategies, Washington, DC</td>
<td>$4,015,229</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Infinite Global, New York, NY</td>
<td>$8,055,189</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Trevelino/Keller, Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>$4,043,027</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>+18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Firms ranked 101 through 131** (representing fees from $383K to $2.1M)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Employees</th>
<th>% Change from 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Judge Public Relations, Tampa, FL</td>
<td>$629,654</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Buttonwood Communications Group, New York, NY</td>
<td>$1,311,200</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+48.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Karbo Communications, San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$2,012,737</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Butler Associates, New York, NY</td>
<td>$1,256,507</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. KCD Public Relations, Inc., San Diego, CA</td>
<td>$1,057,583</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+40.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The Bradford Group, Nashville, TN</td>
<td>$1,345,265</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. AMP3 Public Relations, New York, NY</td>
<td>$665,497</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Bellmont Partners, Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td>$1,826,828</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>+18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Hemsworth Communications, Ft. Lauderdale, FL</td>
<td>$1,750,973</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>+11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. CommCentric Solutions, Inc., Tampa, FL</td>
<td>$995,796</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+11.0</td>
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</table>
## RANKINGS OF PR FIRMS BY CITY/GEOGRAPHY

### CONNECTICUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ICR, Norwalk, CT</td>
<td>$30,192,576</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CashmanKatz, Glastonbury, CT</td>
<td>2,865,000</td>
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### CHICAGO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Edelman (includes Detroit)</td>
<td>$99,833,000</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Walker Sands Communications</td>
<td>14,116,410</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Finn Partners (includes Detroit)</td>
<td>8,702,000</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Greentarget Global LLC</td>
<td>8,467,310</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kivvit</td>
<td>6,985,725</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. G&amp;S Business Communications</td>
<td>5,959,330</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Public Communications Inc.</td>
<td>5,110,141</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. L.C. Williams &amp; Associates</td>
<td>4,705,032</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Padilla</td>
<td>4,258,904</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. APCO Worldwide</td>
<td>4,177,600</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Zapwater Communications</td>
<td>2,805,000</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. O’Malley Hansen Communications</td>
<td>2,413,000</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. MWWPR</td>
<td>1,952,515</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Akrete, Evanston, IL</td>
<td>1,410,893</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Infinite Global</td>
<td>259,093</td>
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### FLORIDA

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<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Zimmerman Agency, Tallahassee</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. rbb Communications, Miami</td>
<td>13,552,882</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. JeffreyGroup, Miami</td>
<td>9,795,712</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fish Consulting, Fort Lauderdale</td>
<td>3,301,775</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Boardroom PR, Fort Lauderdale</td>
<td>2,900,000</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Edelman, Orlando</td>
<td>2,779,000</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hemsworth Comms., Fort Lauderdale</td>
<td>1,750,973</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Dana Agency, Miami</td>
<td>1,031,037</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. CommCentric Solutions, Inc., Tampa</td>
<td>995,796</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kivvit, Miami</td>
<td>747,719</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. TransMedia Group, Boca Raton</td>
<td>650,676</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Judge Public Relations, LLC, Tampa</td>
<td>629,654</td>
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### BOSTON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
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<th>FT Empl.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Racepoint Global</td>
<td>$20,876,000</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. PAN Communications</td>
<td>19,893,730</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Regan Communications Group</td>
<td>18,543,132</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inkhouse, Waltham, MA</td>
<td>17,696,102</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Matter Communications</td>
<td>15,976,074</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 360PR</td>
<td>9,738,953</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rasky Partners, Inc.</td>
<td>8,582,259</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ICR</td>
<td>5,409,612</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. March Communications</td>
<td>4,168,379</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Schneider Associates</td>
<td>3,747,280</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. BackBay Communications</td>
<td>2,984,508</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. LaVoie Health Science</td>
<td>2,489,984</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Hollywood Agency, Hingham, MA</td>
<td>1,752,509</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Edelman</td>
<td>$72,096,000</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. APCO Worldwide</td>
<td>41,817,000</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spectrum</td>
<td>32,900,000</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. IMRE, LLC, Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>21,940,000</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Crosby, Annapolis, MD</td>
<td>20,693,661</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Finn Partners</td>
<td>12,538,000</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. JPA Health Communications</td>
<td>9,264,490</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Merritt Group, McLean, VA</td>
<td>7,904,308</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kivvit</td>
<td>4,873,484</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. SevenTwenty Strategies, LLC</td>
<td>4,015,229</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Padilla</td>
<td>2,216,003</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Stanton Communications</td>
<td>1,955,838</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Rafaelito Herman Strategic Comms.</td>
<td>1,685,316</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. MWWPR</td>
<td>1,145,255</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Weiss PR, Inc., Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>587,820</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Edelman (includes Rochester)</td>
<td>$197,147,000</td>
<td>909</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Zeno Group</td>
<td>73,732,393</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ruder Finn Inc.</td>
<td>69,100,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Prosek Partners</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hotwire</td>
<td>36,879,576</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 5W Public Relations</td>
<td>32,410,427</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. MWWPR (includes NJ offices)</td>
<td>31,851,949</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Finn Partners</td>
<td>29,279,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Health Unlimited</td>
<td>24,267,133</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ICR</td>
<td>24,259,824</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hunter PR</td>
<td>24,000,000</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Havas Formula</td>
<td>22,324,063</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. APCO Worldwide</td>
<td>13,947,500</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Kivvit (includes Asbury Park, NJ)</td>
<td>11,613,425</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Citizen Relations</td>
<td>11,474,688</td>
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</table>

### PENNSYLVANIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bravo Group, Inc., Harrisburg</td>
<td>$16,458,558</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Evoke PR &amp; Influence, Philadelphia</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gregory FCA, Ardmore</td>
<td>9,860,000</td>
<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sam Brown Inc., Wayne</td>
<td>5,621,644</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gatesman, Pittsburgh</td>
<td>2,634,276</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Brownstein Group, Philadelphia</td>
<td>2,537,214</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Buchanan Public Relations, Bryn Mawr</td>
<td>1,586,150</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. WordWrite Communications LLC, Pittsburgh</td>
<td>1,368,300</td>
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### MIDWEST CITIES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Edelman (includes Detroit), Chicago, IL</td>
<td>$99,833,000</td>
<td>557</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Fahlgren Mortine, Columbus, OH</td>
<td>29,632,896</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Walker Sands Comms., Chicago, IL</td>
<td>14,116,410</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Padilla, Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td>13,993,737</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lambert, Grand Rapids, MI</td>
<td>10,055,000</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Finn Partners (includes Detroit), Chicago, IL</td>
<td>8,702,000</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Greentarget Global LLC, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>8,467,310</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kivvit, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>6,985,725</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. G&amp;S Business Comms., Chicago, IL</td>
<td>5,959,330</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tunheim, Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td>5,581,000</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Public Communications Inc., Chicago, IL</td>
<td>5,100,141</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. L.C. Williams &amp; Associates, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>4,705,032</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Padilla, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>4,258,904</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### RANKINGS OF PR FIRMS BY CITY/GEOGRAPHY

#### CHICAGO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>2018 Net Fees</th>
<th>FT Empl.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kivvit</td>
<td>$4,117,600</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merritt Group</td>
<td>$30,192,576</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum</td>
<td>$32,900,000</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edelman</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaVoie Health Science</td>
<td>$2,489,984</td>
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<tr>
<td>March Communications</td>
<td>$4,168,379</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkhouse</td>
<td>$19,893,730</td>
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<tr>
<td>TransMedia Group</td>
<td>$32,900,000</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hemsworth Comms</td>
<td>$2,701,296</td>
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<td>F[inch Partners</td>
<td>$3,264,000</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perry Comms Group</td>
<td>$3,751,386</td>
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<td>Infinite Global</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Communications</td>
<td>$6,985,725</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker Sands Communications</td>
<td>$2,489,984</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwalk, CT</td>
<td>$197,147,000</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1,354,265</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,004,717</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>995,796</td>
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<tr>
<td>7,649,779</td>
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<td>4,043,027</td>
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<td>7,010,951</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,031,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,300,426</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23,212,000</td>
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The firms ranked in the O'Dwyer Co. rankings of PR firms have satisfied O'Dwyer's ranking rules, supporting fees and employee totals with income tax and W-3 forms and providing a current account list. The O'Dwyer rankings should be regarded as an expression of our judgment of a firm's standing within the industry, and are not warrantied to comply with any specific objective standards.

Firms are added to O'Dwyer's rankings throughout the year. Go to odywerprr.com for an up-to-date version of the rankings.
Lessons learned after an agency acquisition

Insights to ensure a seamless transition before, during and after a PR agency sale.

By Art Stevens

If your PR or digital marketing agency is considering an acquisition, you likely know how crucial it is to incorporate careful, strategic planning and collaboration across both entities to ensure a smooth transition and happy, motivated employees.

Effectively communicating the changes throughout the process — both internally and externally — is also important, if not vital. Unfortunately, in cases where communications were handled poorly during an acquisition, management ends up with dissatisfied employees, skeptical clients, and a baffling brand message, among other issues. These effects can create long-term — sometimes permanent — damage.

Whether your acquisition experience is a seamless one depends on numerous factors surrounding company culture, chemistry and collaboration, as well as the blending of best practices of each firm.

Dave Imre, CEO of NYC/LA/Baltimore digital marketing agency imre, knew what he was doing when his agency acquired Los Angeles-based, boutique PR firm, JMPR, last October. I had the pleasure of working with both agencies to help consummate the deal.

Imre’s operations were previously comprised of the imre Health brand alongside its consumer practice, chemistry and collaboration, as well as the blending of best practices of each firm.

According to Dave, the acquisition process has progressed rather seamlessly since planning and negotiations began almost a year ago. As part of the deal, imre has added JMPR’s staff of 13 to its West Coast operations, doubling the size of the firm’s LA office. Imre’s total staff size is now 150 across the combined company.

From a staff and client retention standpoint, Dave said the acquisition has been a positive experience. He attributes the success thus far to numerous crucial factors, including strategic planning. “This meant gaming out every possible scenario ahead of time, and learning as much as possible about the people we were going to inherit ahead of time,” he said.

For those executives considering an agency acquisition, he recommends:

- **Get all leaders involved**
- **Communicate and culture top priorities**

Change can be difficult for employees, and it’s important to understand that they’ll need time and support to adapt to the new “normal.” For a change as significant as an acquisition, all senior executives in each firm should be active, communicative participants before, during and after the process. Senior management must commit to roll up their sleeves and engage with staff members at all levels to keep operations seamless, especially during the transitional period.

“We didn’t want to leave anything to chance during the [acquisition] process,” he said. “We were extremely high-touch with our employees, especially post-sale. In fact, on day one, our two partners and five other senior leaders were on-site in L.A. to welcome new employees and to show them our serious commitment … the goal throughout the process has been to show our dedication to our employees personally.”

- **Make communication and culture top priorities**

The importance of integrating two different cultures can sometimes be overlooked during an acquisition. However, nuances must be considered early on to avoid hindering morale. For instance, imre invested ample time carefully evaluating any potential cultural differences between the two agencies to mitigate potential challenges and circumvent any surprises. Dave said this approach helps avoid hurling new employees into an unfamiliar environment.

“We were very honest from the start, and we outlined the anticipated changes to all participants before, during and after the process. “This has been key to keeping everyone engaged and informed both on JMPR’s side and on our side,” he said.

Just prior to announcing the acquisition publicly, Dave said both agencies personally called top clients on each side to clearly spell out the benefits to them of the deal. Also, within four weeks post-sale, these same clients received in-person, follow-up meetings. “We attribute our client retention rates to this constant, clear communication,” he said.

- **The bottom line**

The process of successfully acquiring or merging companies can take months or even years, and depends, in part, on aspects like culture and size. And both organizations will no doubt experience change as a result. Yet it’s an outstanding opportunity to innovate and open doors.

The takeaway here is to continuously keep communication lines open and keep updating employees, letting them know their place and how they can help make the acquisition process more seamless.

Dave stressed that if both the buyer and seller are fully committed to transparency and constant communication to all stakeholders from the start, the integration period can be a genuine growth opportunity.

“Be sure you talk the talk and walk the walk,” he said. “Your employees and clients will be looking at everything you do to make sure you keep your word throughout the process.”

Art Stevens is Managing Partner of The Stevens Group, comprised of consultants to the PR agency profession and focusing on mergers, acquisitions and management consulting.
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A crisis primer for the social media era

The old crisis management protocols of controlling the narrative while communicating the brand story doesn’t work in a digital age where every action is misconstrued as a misstep and anything you say can and will be used against you.

"Y ou never want a serious crisis to go to waste." These words from President Obama’s Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel have been taken out of context for cynical opportunism. Try making that declaration to Boeing, as its stock price drops in the wake of the 737 Max Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines crashes or any organization fighting to maintain its reputation during a public conflagration. Even if a crisis doesn’t involve the tragic loss of life, far from seeking to capitalize on it, leadership simply wants it to go away.

In the digital-social media age, scandals are spread and remain memorialized a few clicks away. Recent examples include H&M selling a racist t-shirt; Oxfam’s workers paying for sex while working in Haiti; and Tesla CEO Elon Musk running afoul of the SEC with his tweets and smoking weed during a video podcast. Not to mention the post-2016 U.S. presidential election revelation that Facebook had harvested customer data for client Cambridge Analytica without their permission, a contravention of its mission to make the world a “more connected place.”

These debacles metastasized across the web as memes, acquiring a life of their own that companies could do little to stop. Indeed, today every crisis is digital, moving at a velocity that could tarnish even the most pristine brand halo, despite an organization’s best efforts to respond. Social platforms have turned the print media’s 24-hour news cycle into a relic. Yet the average PR team clings to the old mission of “controlling the narrative” by communicating the corporate story early and often.

This approach doesn’t work. According to Eric Dezenhall, CEO of Washington, D.C.-based crisis management firm Dezenhall Resources, during a full-blown crisis it doesn’t matter how merrily a company’s spokesperson talks and how precise its tweets are. “No matter what they do, for a while every action will be considered a misstep,” Dezenhall said. Anything you utter orally or digitally can and will be used against you. It’s time to take a tough look at the PR crisis communications rulebook and write a new one.

Shattering the PR crystal ball

Let’s start by examining a tenet of public relations: the crisis communications plan. However well-intentioned, it’s based on the naïve belief that PR professionals can see the future. Peering into their crystal balls, PR chiefs devise plans for their potential crises. When a predicament occurs, the company implements the corresponding plan to blunt public outcry, avoid product recalls, arrest a plummeting stock price and preserve brand equity. All in a good few months’ work. Theoretically.

Such a PR plan likely includes anticipating issues and preparing responses to each; building a team with roles including a spokesperson that can execute a response to whichever issue arises; developing a holding pattern statement to issue to the media when the crisis happens; being ready to respond immediately after the crisis hits; showing compassion for the people harmed; have the capability to monitor the situation as it occurs; and conduct an analysis when it’s over to assess the effectiveness of the plan.

No PR director ever got fired for developing a crisis plan. But that doesn’t constitute evidence that plans work. “The PR industry over-emphasizes preparation because they get to bill for it,” according to Dezenhall. “Most preparation — not all — is worthless because nothing is predictable. Companies desperately want to be told they can prepare because it gives them the illusion of control.” Accordingly, Dezenhall is adamant that “There is no one ‘approach’ that works. The flaw is that my industry sells an ‘approach.’ Every case is different.”

In short, you can’t plan for a crisis you can’t predict.

Less conversation, more action

While a big crisis plan might make you feel confident today, it likely won’t help you cure an actual future crisis. “It’s more useful to have a response apparatus and strong leadership than a good plan,” Dezenhall said. “The focus should be on making sure you’ve got a strong leader with the authority to act, not in developing a thorough plan that will never be used.”

“To stem a crisis, you need to be able to solve problems with the business rather than engage in the thankless and usually futile efforts of trying to take control of a narrative through words. “If your client doesn’t have the power to authorize a product recall, you don’t have a team leader,” Dezenhall said. “A company’s PR chief almost never has that power.” Like it or not, the de facto crisis leader is the chief executive, not the PR chief, and only executive actions that solve operational and business issues will make a measurable difference.

Going (anti)social

A highly-accepted way of communicating is social media, and you need to stay away from it during a true viral crisis. These days, social isn’t only the preferred channel for issuing apologies. Marketing gurus extol the virtues of upping your social “quotient” by “engaging” your constituents with dialogue and sticky content they can’t get enough of. But when it comes to large corporations, social media doesn’t stem the tide of haters. Quite often, just the opposite results when you “go social.”

According to Dezenhall, “Social media is a vehicle for dispersion. Crisis management is a discipline of containment.” As a result, “More often than not social media exacerbates crises because people over-respond and believe in the old cliché of ‘respond immediately.’ That ethic came from another era when there weren’t cascading technologies magnifying everything.”

In certain situations, social media can be effective. It’s a useful marketing tool and brand positioning channel. But when it comes to getting out your message during turmoil, one need only examine the snarky comments filling up Twitter feeds to see how social can be misused. “I find social media useful for monitoring the state of play on a subject and for communicating discreet, specific information,” Dezenhall said. “It is no forum for engaging in a debate with parties that have a vested interest in keeping hostilities alive.”

Friends, foes, “stakeholders”

Crises aren’t orderly affairs in which everyone speaks when it’s their turn and plays by preset rules. That’s why you have to run certain crisis campaigns like political campaigns because you need friends,” Dezenhall said. “The first thing I look at when I take on a new client is who their adversaries are. If they have serious enemies, they’ll need se-
rious friends and that’s one of the first challenges we have to work our way through.”

Whether you’re a bank, consumer products company or an energy conglomerate, you must not hesitate from enlisting your most powerful constituencies. “Your adversaries will declare your efforts to find friends of your own to be unfair but that shouldn’t stop you.” Presently, it’s not politically correct to conceive of conflict as a zero-sum game. But a crisis isn’t a marketing scenario where everyone wins.

Who’re you going to call?

“Make love not war” isn’t a strategy that works when you’re in a war of ideas. Accordingly, “There are peacetime advisors and wartime advisors,” Dezenhall said, which is why “the skill set and temperament it takes to run a PR campaign to promote a product is different from the skill set required to do battle.” Which experts are you going to hire to weather a crisis?

The people you want on your side are individuals who’ve been subpoenaed, sued and fired — not merely those who’ve been at companies under siege, but people who’ve been through the eye of the storm. Dezenhall recommends people who’ve been in politics rather than the corporate world. “Political types tend to understand it’s a battle, a conflict. Corporate people tend to think everything is a misunderstanding that can be addressed by better communications,” he said.

Beware the glass jaw

It doesn’t matter how beloved an organization is, how strong its brand, how lofty its market valuation. During a crisis, the company can do no right. Gone is your aura of invincibility. Dezenhall used boxing terms to describe the phenomenon. “All companies have ‘glass jaws’ under the wrong set of circumstances.”

An aerospace company with an excellent safety record was recently described by the following New York Times headline: “As Boeing Confronted a Swelling Crisis, It Had Little to Say.” Fair enough. The article says that with the crisis unfolding on social media, Boeing’s customers are not just the airlines but also the airlines’ customers, suggesting it owes them a conversation. But facing an environment in which every word is being digitally parsed, the airline has studiously resisted overcommunicating.

A more trenchant take came from PR Week, which named Boeing’s response its “Flop of the month” for the aircraft manufacturer delaying grounding the 737 Max only after the UK, China, India and Australia — and finally President Trump in the U.S. — grounded the plane.

Boeing is now handling the crisis in a clinical manner, with its CEO claiming the problem is a technical one, searching for a software remedy while emphasizing that the company itself is the proper authority to arrive at the solution and cutting production of the jet. Notably, while the first Boeing 737 took to the skies in 1967 and has a sterling safety record overall, the current crisis seems to involve not only a software problem but also a training issue that lies with both airline and manufacturer to solve.

No words can change the post-crash situation. Better to take the measured, analytical approach of a management consultant to identify the problem, fix it, compensate victims, regain confidence from airlines and regulators and demonstrate over time that the aircraft and software function.

“The solution isn’t a better CEO interview,” Dezenhall said. Crisis management isn’t the same as PR. It’s not about building the brand but rather preserving it by navigating through the thorny situation at hand — not letting a “serious crisis go to waste” but rather knowing when “a win is losing by less.”

Peter Burger is an omnichannel content consultant and communications writer who brings narrative life to brands, products and services, organizational cultures and people. He’s worked with the likes of EY, Deloitte, JPMorgan Chase, Towers Watson, New York Life and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. View his portfolio at aislewpeter.com.

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Microsoft co-founders’ PR rep joins Facebook

John Pinette, who worked for Microsoft Co-Founders Paul Allen and Bill Gates, has joined Facebook as VP-Global Communications.

He takes over for Caryn Marooney, who announced plans to quit in February.

Most recently, Pinette was VP-Marketing and Communications at Vulcan Inc, the philanthropic, technology and business platform of Allen.

Earlier, he headed communications for Gates Ventures, served as Asia-Pacific PR lead for Google, worked in various PR jobs at Microsoft and handled external PR for Pershing Square Capital Management hedge fund.

Wells Fargo’s ex-PR chief joins Zeno

Oscar Suris, the former PR chief at Wells Fargo who exited amid its fake accounts scandal, has joined Zeno Group as Executive VP for Corporate and Crisis Strategy.

At his departure from the embattled bank last August, Suris was Executive VP and head of corporate relations and PR counsel to top management.

The nine-year veteran of the bank was charged with “communicating the company’s vision & values, goals and achievements to key stakeholders—team members, customers, communities and shareholders,” according to his LinkedIn bio.

Earlier, Suris was Director of Corporate Communications at Ford Motor and AutoNation.

The latest Wells Fargo CEO, Tim Sloan, quit March 28 after a three-year run. He had replaced John Stumpf. Allen Parker, general counsel of the bank, is Interim CEO.

Zeno Group, #5 on O’Dwyer’s rankings, is also a Daniel J. Edelman Co. Edelman represents Wells Fargo. It promoted the January launch of the new image campaign tagged “This is Wells Fargo” to highlight its commitment to customer service.

Levick’s Deschauer moves to Markstein

Markstein has hired Jack Deschauer as a strategic consultant in its Washington, D.C. office. Deschauer joins Markstein from LEVICK, where he was a Senior Vice President, co-managing the corporate affairs practice and leading crisis teams.

At LEVICK, Deschauer worked across numerous industries with such clients as CITGO Petroleum Corporation, Pratt & Whitney, the United States Olympic Committee, World TeamTennis and Carnival Cruise Lines.

He previously was a Senior Director at Qorvis Communications, where he worked on national communications programs for defense contractors; nutritional, health and wellness groups; and GQ and Scientific American magazines.

Markstein represents clients including Walmart, Encompass Health, Colonial Pipeline, Diversified Gas & Oil, the International Women’s Media Foundation and The World Games 2021 Birmingham.

Goldman Sachs’ Wells goes to Prosek

Prosek Partners has recruited David Wells, who was Chief Marketing and Communications Officer in Goldman Sachs’ consumer and investment management division, as Partner. Earlier, he headed communications for Goldman’s Americas unit.

Wells has also served as Head of Marketing and Communication, EMEA at J.P. Morgan and has worked as an editor and reporter at the Financial Times and Bloomberg. He has also been a commentator for National Public Radio and was a frequent contributor to programs on CNBC, CNN, the BBC and other networks.

MSL recruits Edelman’s Long

MSL has named Isabel Long Senior Vice President, U.S. Business Development, effective May 1. Long comes to MSL from Edelman’s Chicago office, where she served as SVP, Director of Growth and Development. She has also worked in business development for Deutsch NY and DDB Chicago.

In her new post, Long will lead strategic growth across MSL’s U.S. network, reporting to Chief Integration Officer Amy Cheronis.

MSL, which is part of the Publicis Groupe, has 100 offices in 40 countries.

Brown becomes Cookerly president

Cookerly Public Relations has promoted Stephen Brown to the role of President.

He succeeds agency founder Carol Cookerly, who will remain with the company as CEO.

Brown joined the Atlanta-based communications firm in 2015 as Senior Vice President and Chief Innovation Officer, and was responsible for agency business development and marketing initiatives. He arrived at Cookerly from Cohn & Wolfe, where he was Executive VP and Managing Director of the WPP unit’s Atlanta office.

Prior to that he was a Senior VP in MSL-GROUP’s consumer practice and a Director in Ketchum’s Technology Influencer Relations practice.

Atlanta-based Cookerly, which focuses on crisis and issues management, was founded in 1991.
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Dara Busch, Matthew Caiola, Exec. VPs

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

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


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Melissa Perroni, Employee Engagement Director

360PR+ is an award-winning, creative, independent agency with the expertise and relationships to power earned media, executive thought leadership, influencer marketing, content marketing and experiential activations across a variety of B2c and b2b sectors. Our highly creative and collaborative team members, including a hands-on senior team, are all in with our clients every day, producing business-driving results. Ranked as a Top-50 PR firm nationally, 360PR+ has been recognized as an Agency of the Year and Best Place to Work and is a partner in PROI Worldwide, offering clients in-market resources in 100+ cities.

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APCO Worldwide is an advisory and advocacy communications consultancy helping leading public and private sector organizations act with agility, and build organizational reputations, brands, relationships and solutions to succeed. APCO is an independent and majority women-owned business. Most importantly, we are a trusted partner to our clients. We help them anticipate, plan, execute and secure impact through our curiosity, insights and diverse expertise. Our clients benefit from APCO leaders who have the pulse of the dynamically changing global environment that defines the marketplace; the first-hand experience of having faced significant issues or opportunities; the ability to harness the power of data, insights and technology; and the passion to deliver unparalleled results. Our expertise and integrated approach enable us to provide a full range of services, across industry sectors and global markets, allowing us to offer effective counsel and programs for boards of directors and CEOs.

APCO Worldwide is an independent and majority women-owned business. Most importantly, we are a trusted partner to our clients. We help them anticipate, plan, execute and secure impact through our curiosity, insights and diverse expertise. Our clients benefit from APCO leaders who have the pulse of the dynamically changing global environment that defines the marketplace; the first-hand experience of having faced significant issues or opportunities; the ability to harness the power of data, insights and technology; and the passion to deliver unparalleled results. Our expertise and integrated approach enable us to provide a full range of services, across industry sectors and global markets, allowing us to offer effective counsel and programs for boards of directors and CEOs.

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Bliss Integrated Communication is a 44-year old integrated marketing communication agency that partners with top-tier healthcare, financial and professional services companies—and those who live “in between”—to build reputation and sales through strategic PR, thought leadership, targeted digital media and analytics. Bliss focuses on finding the whitespace that makes each business unique, driv-
Profiles of Ranked PR Firms

Brownstein Group

A results-driven, boutique-sized agency headquartered in Southern California with an office in New York City and a trusted global PR agency network supporting global campaigns. We support start-ups to Fortune 500 companies across hi tech and entertainment. We listen and tell your story from our heart through public relations, marketing and communications to propel your business forward.

We deliver guaranteed, tangible results in our contracts. Does your agency do that?

Find out why clients say, “Bob Gold & Associates is an invaluable addition to our team.”

Let’s talk. We want to put our insights and unparalleled connections to work for you.

Clients: Canoe, Cisco, Content Delivery & Security Association (CDSA), Corning Optical Communications, Fathom Events, Media & Entertainment Services Alliance (MESA), Ooyala, The Cable Center.

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Focusing on the financial, technology and commercial real estate/construction industries, the Bradford Group is a B2B PR firm that generates top-tier coverage and inspires action. Among our clients are the largest banks headquartered in Tennessee, the largest independent, trust-based wealth management firm in the Southeastern United States, the largest fintech company in Tennessee, the largest manufacturer of construction materials in the world, and the #2 electronic discovery firm in the Midwest.

We provide public relations, content creation and digital marketing services that generate results. We excel because we only hire excellent people, thanks to a very strict and comprehensive hiring procedure that assures only the best and the brightest join the team. To get the attention your financial, tech, construction or CRE firm deserves, get the Bradford Group.

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Founded in 1998, Buchanan Public Relations LLC is an award-winning, dog-friendly, national communications agency based in Philadelphia. We specialize in media relations, digital, and crisis communications, with expertise in healthcare, life sciences, financial services, professional services, hedge fund, real estate and consumer goods.

With excellence and integrity as guiding principles, we help brands find and share stories that matter. Our storytelling tools include graphics and video, in addition to...
writing. We pride ourselves on solid, long-term relationships with our clients.


A founding member of the Public Relations Global Network (PRGN), we offer clients access to 50 top-tier, independent PR firms around the world.

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Butler Associates is winner of the PRSA-NY’s 2018 Best Legal & Communications Campaign award and likewise in 2016 was honored with the PRSA-NY’s Best Business Campaign and Best Public Affairs Campaign achievement. Serving clients since 1996, our firm provides strong, effective corporate, financial, legal, crisis and public affairs strategies that have positive, lasting impacts.

Whether a client’s need is a shareholder campaign, CEO-level messaging, brand awareness, or long-range strategic planning, Butler Associates prides itself on developing and nurturing key issues as well as relationships that effectively build and sustain our client’s reputation and brand.

Butler Associates continually achieves significant visibility, spotlights corporate and financial leaders, leads or supports winning campaigns, delivers clear and crisp messaging for a diverse range of clients. Our team includes seasoned professionals who are committed to their clients and deliver consistent, measurable results.

The industries we advocate for include the finance, banking, real estate, construction, legal, medical, telecommunications, high-tech, travel, hospitality and food sectors.

CashmanKatz

CashmanKatz has been producing unexpected ideas and delivering unexpected results for clients since 1992. A full-service integrated marketing agency, CashmanKatz offers multiple disciplines under one roof, including advertising, public relations, social media, media planning and buying, research and branding, content creation and video/audio production services.

CashmanKatz houses three separate operating companies — InFocus (www.ctinfocus.com), Dsign Digital (www.dsigndigital.com), and Octagon Strategy Group (www.octagonstrategy.com) — which offer market research, content creation, and public affairs, respectively. CashmanKatz boasts a broad set of capabilities and three Northeast offices but still maintains a nimble team that generates solutions to clients’ toughest challenges.

We have built an agency that most clients don’t expect. A multi-service enterprise that feels like a creative boutique. An unassuming shop with the game-changing idea and the resources to see it through.

Among its clients, Butler Associates represents the Great New York Automobile Dealers Association, which owns and produces the New York International Auto Show.
In 2019, global companies and institutions will confront unforeseen events that could alter their future, pose unprecedented challenges, and potentially set them on a new course that will redefine their organization and significantly impact their key stakeholders.

With nearly five decades of experience, Kekst CNC is one of the world’s leaders in counseling clients on special situations including: corporate and financial communications, mergers & acquisitions, shareholder activism and governance, crisis communications, regulatory investigations/resolutions, litigation support, IPO communications, restructurings, issues and reputation management, as well as change management and employee engagement. In most every instance, our proven experience, sound judgment, and results are supported by data-driven insights, based on proprietary research and analysis capabilities.

That’s why more than 600 clients around the world rely on Kekst CNC as their strategic communications partner. With 250 professionals located in 12 offices in key global markets, we create and implement communications strategies to support every aspect of our clients’ business objectives to: help them grow organically or through acquisition; help them to undertake transformative initiatives; or help them protect themselves against specific or unforeseen threats and high stakes reputational issues.

Kekst CNC: a Leading Global Strategic Communications Consultancy.
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The Crosby team is passionate about helping clients Inspire Actions That Matter™ — actions that positively impact people’s lives and contribute to the greater good. Crosby helps clients make powerful connections with their customers, constituents and communities to shape attitudes, inspire behavior change, and motivate action. The firm’s award-winning campaigns, which integrate paid, earned, shared and owned media, have touched the lives of virtually every American.


Crosby is #26 on O’Dwyer’s national ranking of PR firms, #7 for healthcare PR, and is a member of the PR Council and American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As). The firm has offices in Maryland’s state capital of Annapolis and in Washington, D.C. To see case studies and capabilities, visit www.crosbymarketing.com.

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Founded in 2003, The Dana Agency is recognized as a leading boutique public relations agency founded by award-winning publicist Dana Rhoden. With offices in NYC, LA and Miami, The Dana Agency specializes in national, regional and trade public relations outreach, marketing, creative special events, brand management and product placement for lifestyle brands. The Dana Agency’s team of trusted communication con-

CASHMANKATZ

Spanning nearly 20 industry verticals, Coyne’s client roster includes many of the most respected companies in the world and those who want to be, including Hard Rock International, Shell Oil, Chrysler, Pfizer, Hilton, VTech and IMAX, among others.

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At Crenshaw Communications our mission is to help turn high-growth tech companies into powerhouse brands. For startup companies and established businesses alike, we shape and communicate compelling brand stories that bring meaningful innovation to life. Our campaigns translate product and service attributes into real brand equity. They’re designed not just to generate positive visibility, but to engage prospects and build connections with influencers and end users. As the partner to many new technology companies, we have a high-energy, entrepreneurial culture that rewards action and accountability, with outcomes that are transformational for clients.

Crenshaw Communications. Come for the insights and ideas. Stay for the results.

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As one of the Top Independent PR Firms in the U.S., Coyne PR delivers programs built on a foundation of stand-out creative, integrated thinking and activation capabilities to effectively convey messages across paid, earned, shared and owned channels for its clients. These programs have been recognized with more than 1,000 industry awards since the agency’s inception in 1991 and led to the agency being named the Best Agency to Work For Globally by The Holmes Report.

Coyne staff members support the company’s mission of “Inspiring Actions That Matter” by donating time and money to worthy charities and nonprofits.
The agency specializes in creative strategy for a wide array of national brands spanning food and beverage, hospitality, real estate, health/wellness, beauty, fashion, entertainment, arts and culture and consumer products. Clients benefit from the reach of a larger, more expensive firm but with the media expertise, responsiveness and nimbleness of a specialized boutique agency.

DEVELOPMENT COUNSELLORS INTERNATIONAL (DCI)

Regional Offices: Denver; Los Angeles; Toronto

Karyl Leigh Barnes, President, Tourism Practice
Julie Curtin, President, Economic Development Practice
Andrew Levine, Chairman

One Agency. Two Specialized Practice Areas. Established in 1960, Development Counsellors International (DCI) focuses exclusively on economic development and travel marketing. We have worked with more than 500 cities, regions, states, provinces and countries to help them attract business investment, visitors and talent. Experts in economic development marketing, DCI knows how to elevate a community’s image, increase project inquiries and help create new investment opportunities and quality jobs. We then help attract skilled talent to fill those jobs. Our travel marketing team partners with destinations to increase leisure, corporate and association visitor arrivals and spending. How? By winning the support of key influencers — media, digital influencers, meeting planners and the travel trade. Our goal always? Combine smart strategy with the right tactics to deliver powerful results.

DCI is globally connected through TAAN Worldwide, a network of 46 agencies in 29 countries.

Richard Dukas, Chairman and CEO; and Seth Linden, President, Dukas Linden Public Relations.

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

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

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

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

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Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to lead and act with certainty, earning the trust of their stakeholders. Since our founding in 1952, we have remained an independent, family-run business. Edelman owns specialty companies Edelman Intelligence (research) and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle). For more information please visit: www.edelman.com

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Maryellen Royle, President, PR & Influence

Evoke PR & Influence is the global, award-winning public relations and stakeholder engagement division of Evoke, a leading marketing, media and communications agency that is bound by a common purpose of making “Health More Human.” Evoke PR & Influence uses its knowledge, influencer relationships, and proven experience to connect leading industry organizations with the audiences that matter most. We translate the science behind health and wellness companies, products and services into meaningful stories that get heard, always striving to achieve our clients’ objectives on time and within budget.

Clients include: Adaptimmune; Almirall; Ferring Pharmaceuticals; Harmony Biosciences; Idera Pharmaceuticals; Incyte Corporation; Janssen, the Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson; Life Sciences Pennsylvania; Nutricia; Reckitt Benckiser (RB); Teva Pharmaceuticals and Zyerba Pharmaceuticals.

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Fahlgren Mortine is an integrated marketing and communications company headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, with locations in Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio; Charleston, W. Va.; Boise, Idaho; Denver, Colo.; Myrtle Beach, S.C.; Miami; Chicago and New York City. The agency is a member of the global IPREX network.

Key industries include B2B, CPG, economic development, healthcare, higher education, manufacturing, logistics, retail, technology, and travel and tourism.

Our integrated model differentiates the Fahlgren Mortine experience by allowing us to pursue the best solution to our clients’ challenges regardless of the medium. We consistently achieve a Net Promoter Score placing us in what the metric creator deems the “world-class” range, and it means clients enthusiastically recommend us to their peers.

The agency consistently earns Best Place to Work and Agency of the Year honors from various trade...
FAHLGREN MORTINE

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organizations.

TURNER, a travel, tourism and active lifestyle public relations agency, is a Fahlgren Mortine company.

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Feintuch Communications is an award-winning technology and financial services firm offering senior counsel, experience and tactical support to a broad range of organizations — from the Fortune 500 to emerging companies, non-profits and associations.

Key market segments include AV, adtech/martech, cleantech, consumer electronics, e-commerce, fintech and financial services, professional services and start-ups.

Our focus is on business results — helping our clients build distribution, sell more products or services, improve their corporate or brand image and achieve other business outcomes. Every client engagement is managed — hands-on — by a senior practitioner responsible for results.

We provide clients with an integrated blend of public relations, social media, advertising/marketing, investor relations, web/digital marketing and other services. Our firm serves on the board of PR World Alliance (www.PRWorldAlliance.com), a global partnership of premier independent communications consultancies.

Our goal is to provide the expert service, experienced counsel and hands-on support that our clients need to meet their business objectives. Our commitment is to be a superior business partner in each and every client engagement.

Clients include: BasisCode Compliance, HDMI Licensing Administrator, Leclanché, Silicon Line and ZeeVee.

Henry Feintuch, President, Feintuch Communications and 2014 past President, PRSA-NY.

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Finn Partners’ success as one of the leading independent public relations agencies in the world is a result of organic growth, the integration of strategic acquired companies and new talent united through shared values and a common philosophy of “working hard and having nice.” Our 700 strategists across 18 offices in the US, Europe and Asia, provide deep expertise in key sectors: technology, health, consumer, travel + lifestyle, food + beverage, CSR, sustainability, corporate, financial services, crisis, education, public + government affairs and manufacturing and trade.

Our full-service marketing and communications services deliver break-through campaigns rooted in analytics and insights, powered by strategy and creativity, and awarded for results that positively impact our clients’ revenues and reputation. Our global integrated digital team, which expanded in 2018, creates the social conversations that engage stakeholders, stimulate emotionality and elevate brands.

We are proud of our multiple agency awards including being honored as a “Best Place to Work” several times by leading PR trades and our recent Diversity Distinction Award, a testament to our commitment to diversity and inclusion across our worldwide network.

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Fish’s in-depth experience in franchising helps us customize national and local programs for our clients that drive both consumer engagement and franchise sales. Our services range from national and local media relations, franchisee recruitment, grand openings, influencer relations and cause marketing to crisis communications. Our focus is to meet and exceed our clients’ business goals by providing strategic counsel and marketing support that goes beyond traditional public relations.

We’re proud to serve systems of all sizes, from emerging brands to some of the industry’s leading concepts and pride ourselves on becoming your PR partner. Clients include Dunkin’, Denny’s, Neighborly, FOCUS Brands, Massage Heights, Captain D’s, Fleet Feet, Chicken Salad Chick, Tropical Smoothie Café, Blow Blow Dry Bar and more.

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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. Firmly entrenched among the country’s 20 largest PR firms (2019 O’Dwyer’s Ranking of Top U.S. PR Firms), FWV was winner of The Holmes Report 2016 Consumer Agency of the Year and the Bulldog Reporter 2017 Consumer, Midsize and North American Communications Agency of the Year. It has captured 15 National Agency of the Year honors over the past two decades and is a 2019 Holmes Report Consumer Agency of the Year Finalist for the fifth time.

Founded in April 1997, the firm is led by Chairman & CEO Rick French, President David Gwyn and Chief Operating Officer Natalie Best. FWV employs 113 public relations, public affairs, social media, advertising and digital marketing experts between its Raleigh, N.C. headquarters and New York City, Los Angeles and Tampa offices. Among its operating divisions are: FWV Fetching, a pet and veterinary PR and marketing agency based in Tampa; AMP3 PR, a fashion, beauty, luxury and lifestyle PR firm based in New York City; and Prix Productions, the company’s longform content feature and documentary film division, with offices in Raleigh and L.A.

FWV is also a partner in IPREX, a $380 million + network of global communications agencies, with 1,600 staff and 110 offices worldwide.

In addition to ranking FWV 18th nationally in audited annual fee billings, O’Dwyer’s ranks FWV #1 in the Southeast, a position it has occupied for more than 15 years. Among the top agencies, FWV ranks second in Sports Marketing, third in both Beauty & Fashion and Agriculture, fourth in Entertainment Marketing, and 10th in Travel & Economic Development. The agency’s work in Food & Beverage, Home Furnishings, Professional Services, Environmental & Public Affairs also earned category rankings in the top 20.
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John Gatesman, CEO
Shannon Baker, Partner, President

We are writers, researchers and news hounds.
Gatesman PR tackles your toughest business and communications challenges — whether it’s to stand out in a competitive environment, change perception, protect your reputation or navigate the rapidly evolving digital world.

Our strategic consumer-centric model puts your target audiences at the forefront to motivate action and influence behavior that increases sales, market share and brand affinity.

We combine critical and creative thinking to produce ideas and content that stem from research and insights to disrupt, educate and engage consumers, media and the industry. We believe in research, so much so that we invest more than $200,000 annually in tools and resources to benefit your business.

Founded in 2006, Gatesman is a privately held corporation owned by partners John Gatesman and Shannon Baker. Gatesman is an award-winning, full-service public relations practice that ranks nationally within the top 100 independent PR firms, and is a partner in IPREX, a global communication network. Most recently, Gatesman PR was named a Top Place to Work by PR News and earned Best In Show at the 2018 PRSA East Central District Diamond Awards and the 2019 PRSA Renaissance Awards.

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Michael Olguin, President & CEO

Founded in 1992, Havas Formula is an award-winning, national public relations agency headquartered in New York, with offices in Los Angeles, Chicago, San Diego, and Miami. Part of Havas, the agency is committed to making a meaningful difference to brands, businesses and people. Havas Formula specializes in general market and Hispanic PR, social/digital and experiential marketing. Its corporate philosophy — Be Brave — stems from the belief that for a brand to truly differentiate itself in the marketplace it must exhibit bravery. The agency’s core practice areas include consumer, lifestyle, consumer technology, high-tech, B-to-B, travel/hospitality and entertainment, with category expertise in food and beverage, retail and restaurants, beer/wine/spirits, sports/leisure, consumer packaged goods, home, and beauty/fashion.

Clients include: Jaguar Land Rover, Panda Express, Mike’s Hard Lemonade, Hefty, Maui Jim, Wholly Guacamole, Schlage, Justin’s, Shure, Wonderful Pistachios and RE/MAX.

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Julia Jackson, Practice Leader, US Public Relations and Marketing Communications

Health Unlimited is a global health consultancy and communications agency built by specialists with unmatched experience, perspective and expertise. For more than 25 years we have been driving results for companies solving the world’s most complex and challenging health issues. We have a legacy of advancing landmark developments in global health and challenging, hard to treat health conditions such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, rare diseases, infectious diseases and vaccine preventable diseases. We drive results for a diverse group of companies and organizations invested in solving the world’s most complex and challenging health issues in these areas. Clients include medical device, pharmaceuticals, government agencies, medical societies, advocacy organizations and consumer health.

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Hemsworth is a full-service PR and communications agency that specializes in three core areas — travel/tourism/hospitality, food/...
wine/spirits, and franchise/business services. Capabilities and services range from brand strategy, promotions, media relations and events to guerrilla marketing, social media, CSR programming and thought leadership.

With headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and offices in Atlanta and Charleston — as well as a network of expert freelance PR professionals in markets like NYC and Northern California — the Hemsworth team features unparalleled global connections. The agency prides itself on delivering outstanding results with a distinctively personal touch and offering a unique combination of passion, insight and connections to surpass client expectations at every turn.

Hemsworth has won numerous awards for its work within the PR and communications industry, as well as the national business community, and is consistently ranked one of the fastest-growing firms in the United States. In addition, Hemsworth’s unique internal culture and extensive employee benefits have earned the agency a coveted spot on several “Best Places to Work” lists.

Clients include: Air Partner, AmaWaterways; Amicalola Falls State Park & Lodge; Best Western Hotels & Resorts; Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa; Driftwood Hospitality Management; First American Bank; Gatsby’s Joint; HSMAI Foundation; I Heart Mac & Cheese; Lake Blackshear Resort; Massanutten, Virginia; Margaritaville Holdings; Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort; Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake of the Ozarks; Medieval Times; Oasis Travel Network; Orion Span’s Aurora Station (Luxury Space Hotel); SmartCruiser.com; Sonesta Fort Lauderdale Beach; Steelpan; Stems & Skins; Taste of Buckhead; Unicoi State Park & Lodge; PuroClean; Walgreens Gridiron Grill-Off Food, Wine & Music Festival

THE HOFFMAN AGENCY

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Lou Hoffman, CEO

Stephen Burkhart, General Manager, North America
Caroline Hsu, Managing Director, Asia Pacific
Mark Pinsent, Managing Director, Europe
Lydia Lau, VP of Global Operations

Defining communications broadly to include digital, content marketing, thought leadership as well as traditional PR, The Hoffman Agency knows how to differentiate brands and deliver air cover for sales. With heritage in the technology sector, the firm’s work today cuts across a range of industries. While campaigns vary by client and industry, all share one theme: the creation of content that reflects the tenets of storytelling. This means developing narratives that prompt journalists to write and target audiences to read — a far cry from the “corporate speak” that satisfies internal stakeholders. Toward this end, the firm conducts storytelling workshops for internal communicators, executives and employees.

For clients with global needs, the company operates in Asia Pacific, Europe and the United States. Unlike traditional agencies handicapped by their silo structure, The Hoffman Agency applies a collaborative approach to implementing multi-country campaigns. This leverage of content and thinking across geographies ultimately generates better results.

Sample Clients: Axis Communications, B-Secur, Baidu, Blackberry, Cypress, City of Fremont, Corn ing, Crypto.com, Flex, KaOS, Lam Research, Lenovo, Lumileds, Nautilus, NextFlex, Nokia, Nutanix, OSIsoft, Revation, SpinTransfer, and SuperMicro.

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Barbara Bates, Global CEO
Heather Kernahan, President, North America
Adrian Talbot, Chief Finance Officer
Andy West, Chief Development Officer
Chris Paxton, Chief Strategy Officer
Fiona Chilcott, Chief People & Culture Officer

Hotwire is a global communications agency that helps businesses better engage and connect with their customers. From Sydney to San Francisco, we operate with a borderless mind-set across 33 locations including the UK, US, Mexico, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Australia, together with exclusive partners Yellow Communications in the Netherlands and Belgium, Active DMC in the Middle East, The Hoffman Agency in Asia and VIANEWS in Brazil, as well as other affiliate partners.

HUNTER

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Grace Leong, CEO
Jonathan Lyon, Mark Newman, Donetta Allen, Gigi Russo, Erin Hanson, Partners

Hunter is an award-winning consumer marketing communications firm with primary offices in New York and London and a footprint across North America. Beginning with research-driven consumer insights, Hunter executes strategic, integrated programs that build brand equity, increase engagement and drive measurable business results for consumer products and

Profile of Ranked PR Firms

The Hoyt Org team takes a well-deserved night out on the town to attend the LA PRSA Prism Awards.

Leeza L. Hoyt, President
Dan Minkoff, Associate VP

With offices in greater Los Angeles and partners worldwide, The Hoyt Organization, Inc., knows a thing or two about reaching the right audience. In fact, as one of the continuously top-ranked independent PR firms by the Los Angeles Business Journal, THO reaches markets all across the country with clients based in New York, Virginia, New Jersey, Phoenix, Kansas City, Dallas, Seattle and more. As the Los Angeles area agency for the Public Relations Global Network (PRGN), we have 53 partner agencies around the globe which allows us to also offer international boots-on-the-ground capabilities.

Our full-service, integrated communications campaigns have made a tangible difference for hundreds of start-ups, public and private companies, nonprofits, and more. Today, the firm serves real estate, finance, technology, healthcare and luxury/lifestyle clients on a nationwide basis.

THO’s greatest strength is our growth-oriented strategies. Our media relations, communications and digital media programs feature thoughtful, laser-focused game plans that use the right tactical tools to break through the bland in your market. With a deep understanding of everything from traditional earned media to emerging social and digital platforms to crisis communications, we’ll strengthen your voice and amplify your brand.

THO. Because your voice matters.

Profiles of Ranked PR Firms

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Profiles of Ranked PR Firms

The Hoyt Org team takes a well-deserved night out on the town to attend the LA PRSA Prism Awards.
Strategic Communications at the Intersection of Valuation and Reputation

Integrated Corporate Communications and Positioning

Crisis Communications and Issue Management

Investor Relations

Transaction Support

Public Affairs

Social Media and Digital Communications

Shareholder Activism and Proxy Contests

Strategic Insights
Profiles of Ranked PR Firms

HUNTER

Continued from page 70

services. The 120-person firm employs a powerful blend of marketing solutions including strategic planning, social and digital media, talent and influencer engagement, media relations, experiential, multicultural, and content creation and distribution for all platforms and channels to earn consumer attention on behalf of some of the world’s best known and most beloved brands.

Founded in 1989 with a specialization in food and nutrition, Hunter has grown into one of the most respected and awarded mid-size marketing communications firms in the country, proudly serving a broad range of esteemed companies and brands across Food + Beverage, Wine + Spirits, Home + Lifestyle, Health + Beauty, Retail + Ecommerce, Travel + Restaurants, Education, Fashion, and Toys + Games.

Our motto is “we earn it,” and at Hunter we focus on doing so in three key areas: earning consumer attention, earning client relationships and earning staff dedication. Our creative approach and client service-orientation has led to some of the most enduring client relationships in the business including TABASCO® Pepper Sauce (30 years), 3M (22 years), Diageo (15 years), Church & Dwight (13 years), and Johnson & Johnson Consumer Inc. (12 years).

ICR

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


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Jamie Diaferia, Founder & CEO
Zach Olsen, President

INFINITE GLOBAL is an award-winning communications firm providing PR, Branding and Content services. Led by seasoned media professionals and top creative directors, we help professional services firms and other complex businesses demonstrate their expertise to sophisticated audiences.

Our roots are in the legal sector, where our unrivaled depth of knowledge allows us to provide counsel to the world’s largest, most profitable and most specialized law firms. Other professional services firms look to us for a nuanced understanding of their businesses, a clear sense of the kinds of stories that make news, and tested knowledge of when and how to engage the media.

Our unwavering client focus sets us apart. Our approach and success earns accolades from our clients and peers, including winning The National Law Journal’s “Best PR Firm” award seven years running. But the most flattering honor we receive is the vote of confidence from our clients who retain us year after year, including many that have worked with us for a decade or more.

J PUBLIC RELATIONS

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https://www.instagram.com/jpublicrelations/

Jamie Sigler O’Grady and Sarah Evans, Partners at J Public Relations.

J Public Relations (JPR) is an international luxury PR, influencer management and social media agency specializing in hospitality, travel and luxury lifestyle brands. With 80 team members across four offices in New York City, London, Los Angeles and San Diego, plus a presence in Denver and Arizona, JPR is a trusted leader in media relations and brand strategy, trend forecasting, brand partnerships, influencer relations, and social media strategy. Always evolving, JPR is an innovator in all things travel and was the first travel PR agency to

On the occasion of the firm’s 30th anniversary, to better reflect its diverse roster of marketing communications services for earning consumer attention, the leading consumer agency known since 2000 as Hunter Public Relations updated its brandmark and simplified its name to Hunter.
launch a podcast in 2018, Priority Status.

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

JPR is listed on the Observer’s annual “PR Power 50” as one of the country’s most powerful PR firms and Crain’s “Best Places to Work in New York City.” The agency also garnered “Top Places to Work” by PR News and “Agency of the Year” by Bulldog Reporter in addition to multiple trade and consumer awards for company culture and brand success. JPR’s client campaigns have won multiple HSMAI Adrian Awards and named a finalist in The Shorty Awards.


Atwell, Kim Fox, Partners
Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock, Inc. is a top-10 strategic communications consulting firm devoted to helping the nation’s health systems and health services companies navigate confidently through change, challenge and opportunity. With offices in Nashville and Chicago, Jarrard Inc. has guided leaders at more than 400 healthcare organizations across the country through high-stakes moments, including leading communications and political strategy for more than $60 billion in announced M&A. Our team of former journalists, political operatives and healthcare executive works alongside every client to build a custom strategy that delivers measurable results in the areas of M&A, issues and crisis management, strategic positioning opportunities and systemic change management. For more information, visit jarrardinc.com.

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Latin America is Our Business, Our Only Business. As the only agency dedicated exclusively to working with multinational clients and brands in this part of the world, JeffreyGroup has been an industry leader in the fast-growing markets of Latin America since 1993. Our specialization and expertise have attracted some of the world’s largest companies and best-known brands. We’re proud that our current retainer clients include Airbus, Amazon, American Airlines, Bayer, BlackRock, Citibank, Facebook, GE, HBO, Mastercard, Marriott, PepsiCo, Salesforce and Samsung, among others. JeffreyGroup has continually evolved to provide a full range of marketing, corporate communication and public affairs services. With owned offices in the largest markets of Latin America and regionwide capabilities, our teams of local market experts provide unique insights and generate results in alignment with global strategies and international standards of excellence.

JPA HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

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Carrie Jones, Principal
Michael O’Brien, Stephen Piotrowski and Diane Wass,
Managing Directors

JPA Health is an award-winning public relations, marketing and advocacy firm known for sharing our clients’ commitment to making people healthier. With deep expertise in these core services, JPA offers a truly integrated model that delivers sustained business results. The agency works across the health sector, including biopharma, medtech, and non-profit organizations. JPA has built a proprietary tool, GreteTM, which segments audiences and provides unparalleled insights for reaching and engaging influencers in health and healthcare.

JPA’s exclusive focus on health means that clients can count on a team with the experience and perspective to provide sound, strategic health, medical and science communications counsel, rooted in the realities of this dynamic landscape.

The agency is recognized for its ability to deliver results quickly. As partners with our clients, we drive meaningful relationships, stimulate intellectual curiosity, combine data and intuition to go deeper and see beyond the obvious and creatively solve complex problems.

JPA is a woman-owned agency with offices in Washington, DC, Boston and London, and is a member of IPRN, the world’s leading independent public relations agency network.

KARBO COMMUNICATIONS

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Julie Karbo, Founder & CEO

Are you looking for a respected and inventive PR and digital marketing agency with a track record of delivering revenues, industry leading stature, partners and funding? Karbo Com’s services combine successful and inventive PR programs with the newest digital marketing services. Startups to Fortune 500 enterprises trust Karbo Communications for our industry knowledge, strategic thinking, creativity and the tech industry’s entrepreneurial spirit to create and amplify market leadership and out-perform competitors.

Continued on page 74
Karbo Com offers an extensive array of innovative services, including branding, corporate and product PR, social media, creative services, digital marketing campaigns plus content creation.

Unlike most other agencies, Karbo Com ensures client teams are always led by senior people on a day-to-day basis. You won’t get bench players. A varied and multi-talented team synthesizes the worlds of PR, journalism and digital marketing—with a Silicon Valley ethos. Our teams have ushered in technologies such as the cloud, SaaS, AI, the Internet of Things, data analytics, mobile, security, networking, augmented reality and wearables.

We’ve worked extensively with both B2B and consumer tech companies ranging from small startups to global, billion dollar brands, including: Apple, Cisco, Digg, eBay, Equinix, Fog World Congress, Go Daddy, Intel, the IoT World Conference, The National Geographic, NerdiWallet, and Oracle.

Current Clients: TIBCO, TDK, Logitech, 8th Wall, Pigeon Project Text, The Tylt, OnScale, Megaport, Penguin Computing, RTI (Real-Time Innovations), Harmony Helper, i.amond Pro

KIVVIT

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Additional Offices: New York, NY / Washington, D.C. / Miami, FL / Asbury Park, NJ

Eric Sedler, Managing Partner Maggie Moran, Managing Partner

Kivvit is a nationally recognized strategic communications and public affairs firm with offices in Chicago, New York, New Jersey, Miami, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Kivvit prides itself on being a strategic advisor to organizations with big ideas and complex challenges.

Kivvit is defining the agency of the future. We don’t have silos. We integrate our full suite of data-driven advertising and strategic communications capabilities across teams. Our holistic approach combines analytics, technology, and content to produce hyper-targeted campaign plans that shape public opinion, impact public policy, and enhance business outcomes. Our relentless focus on measurement means that our work maximizes results and achieves tangible goals for our clients.

Kivvit’s culture is marked by an entrepreneurial spirit as well as an insatiable curiosity to master our client sectors and constantly find innovative solutions. We start from scratch every time we develop a campaign plan. No campaign is exactly the same; each is tailored to our clients’ needs. That’s what sets Kivvit apart.

Our client roster includes: Airbnb, Allstate, Anheuser-Busch, Aon, BAE Systems, BlueCross BlueShield, Citadel LLC, Delta Airlines, Exelon, Ford, General Dynamics, Google, Lyft, PSEG, Tesla, United States Olympic Committee, University of Chicago brands. The team of almost 40 professionals provides public relations, social media, influencer, content and marketing services focused on garnering measurable results that positively impact brand growth. Konnect Agency represents both national and international companies via offices in Los Angeles, New York, Denver and Austin, Texas. Clients include Fatburger, Lyft, KRAVE Jerky, Sky Zone, Mrs. Fields and ONE Brands, to name a few. Using an integrated-approach and with a desire to add incremental value, Konnect is a true partner that promotes client-agency transparency, the use of technology to better client relationships, and a thoughtful approach to media and influencer relations.

KONNECT AGENCY

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Sabina Gault, CEO Monica Guzman, CCO Amanda Blailek, EVP Carmen Hernandez, Mng. Director

Konnect Agency (www.konnectagency.com) is a strategic business partner for food & beverage, lifestyle, family, and franchise

KYNE


David Kyne, Founder & CEO Maureen Byrne, Wendy Woods-Williams, Executive VPs Joanne Wunder, Managing Director Michael Grela, Michele Kleinmann, Amanda Mulally, Darcy Sawatzki, Traci Tournoux, Senior VPs Julie O’Donnell, Global Head of Digital

KYNE is an award-winning specialty health communications agency dedicated to helping improve and save lives. We were founded on the belief that communication is a powerful health intervention. Our team are alumni of global communications firms, non-profit organizations, foundations and biopharmaceutical companies, united by a passion for making a real difference in health. We approach our work with compassion, enthusiasm and optimism. But our greatest strength isn’t just our ability to connect the dots. It’s in creating programs that achieve real change, leveraging our skills, expertise and passion to break down barriers. We develop and deliver tailored programs to meet each clients’ goals and objectives. We love what we do, we live what we do, and we truly believe in what we do.

Key Clients: Aplylam, AstraZeneca, The Carter Center, Parkinson’s Foundation, World Federation of Hemophilia

LANDIS COMMUNICATIONS INC.

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David Landis, CEO Sean Dooley, GM Brianne Miller, Business Development Manager David Cumpton, Senior Director

Named America’s #1 PR Agen-
Profiles of Ranked PR Firms

cy (Small Firm) (Ragan’s) and #1 Healthcare PR Agency in America (Ragan’s) and called “the Bay Area’s consumer/B2B PR and marketing communications experts,” San Francisco-based Landis Communications Inc. (LCI) is celebrating nearly 30 years in business. LCI also is a Bulldog Award winner for social media and media relations and has been named the #1 Social Media Agency in the U.S. by TopPRAgencies.com.

LCI is a full-service public relations, digital/social media and marketing communications agency that specializes in healthcare, real estate, environmental, consumer, consumer technology, B2B, corporate and institutional public relations campaigns that help support each business’ identified goals. Through its Promised Results return-on-investment program, LCI provides tangible metrics for your PR dollars. Clients include: Velodyne Lidar, Sutter Health, Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford, UCSF, Global Alzheimer’s Platform, Walmart, Match.com, California Bank & Trust, Brain Health Registry, Carrington College, Save the Redwoods League, Peninsula Open Space Trust, MetLife, Whole Foods Market and more. LCI is a proud member of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, is an official Corporate Diversity Supplier and is certified as a Small Business Enterprise by the City of San Francisco. LCI is the San Francisco member agency of the Public Relations Global Network, with 50 affiliate agencies worldwide. Call us at: 415/561-0888, email us at: info@landispr.com or visit LCI online at: www.landispr.com.

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LaunchSquad is an award-winning public relations and creative communications agency with offices in San Francisco, New York, Boston and Chicago. They are a group of dynamic storytellers who build meaningful brands by creating and spreading the stories of change-the-world companies. LaunchSquad takes a customized, holistic approach to storytelling. Over the past 19 years, they have built long-lasting, powerhouse brands. Much like the disruptors they represent, they like to do things differently. LaunchSquad’s expertise spans both consumer-facing and B2B clients in a variety of industries including consumer technology, enterprise technology, fashion, retail, entertainment, media, e-commerce, education, gaming, finance, energy and more.

LAVOIEHEALTH-SCIENCE
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LaVoieHealthScience is a health science focused, award winning integrated communications agency providing IR and PR bringing...
18 years of industry-tested counsel to more than 375 clients. Our specialized expertise in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, medical technology and devices, and digital and public health uniquely positions us to help clients make their health and science innovations known, understandable, and approachable to target stakeholders through carefully executed strategies and plans.

The agency has received over 50 awards in recognition of the work it has done for emerging and established industry leaders helping our clients from development to launch to commercialization. We help advance health and science innovations by providing specialized thinking to clients throughout the company and product life cycle building innovation and value for human kind. We offer direct connections to media, investors, partners, advocacy groups, and KOLs. We are focused on building trust and long-term relationships based on the quality of the work that we deliver. Many of our client relationships go back over a decade.


LAZAR PARTNERS

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At Lazar Partners, we don’t just deliver your message - we catalyze the connections that drive business results and enhance your reputation. Our clients count on us to deliver proactive strategic recommendations as well as flawless execution. For the last 18 years, private and public companies have benefited from our proven approaches to strengthening relationships with healthcare professionals, patients, third-party organizations, the financial community, the media, and business partners. Our commitment to clients is to forge trusting connections that build brand equity, increase goodwill and grow shareholder value.

Yet even companies with great reputations sometimes find themselves facing challenging situations that can harm their brand and we stand with you to manage and overcome crisis situations.

LOU HAMMOND GROUP

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Lou Rena Hammond, Founder
Stephen Hammond, CEO

Lou Hammond Group (LHG) is an award-winning firm specializing in the key industries of travel, economic development, destinations, culinary/spirits, real estate, lifestyle, and technology. With offices in New York, Charleston, Houston, Miami and Los Angeles, the agency has 40 employees offering brand development, public relations, digital strategy, social media management and analysis, creative programming, and marketing strategy.

For over three decades, LHG has been an industry leader providing superior, results-driven services to clients around the globe. Founded by industry trailblazer Lou Hammond, the agency takes pride in remaining fiercely independent and departing from business-as-usual. LHG continues to grow with an emphasis on digital, social, design, advertising and branding in an ever-evolving media landscape. With quality and trust as guiding principles, LHG has developed a proven yet agile and strategic approach earning it recognition as one of the nation’s most award-winning marketing and communications firms.

March Communications is a Boston PR agency — with an office in Chicago — that partners with innovative B2B and consumer technology companies to bring their stories to life. Our insights-first approach fuels integrated PR programs that influence key targets and drive business value. Companies searching for a top consumer tech PR agency or a firm with deep expertise in AI, security, healthcare, martech or fintech should place March Communications at the top of their agency shortlist. Recent clients include Drift, Affectiva, Zix, Sophos, Notarize, Noodel.ai and many more.

It doesn’t matter if you’re a consumer tech startup or an established security, robotics, AI or healthcare company, all programs with March Communications are rooted in solid strategy and a commitment to achieve measurable outcomes.

Award-winning PR. Killer Content. Insights-rich digital. All tied together to tell your story of innovation across all key platforms.

MWWPR

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Michael Kempner, Founder & CEO
Bret Werner, President
Will Starace, CFO
Gina Cherwin, Chief People Officer
Parker Ray, Chief Digital Strategist
Carl Sorvino, Exec. Creative Dir.
Carreen Winters, Chief Strategy Officer
Dawn Lauer, Tara Naughton, Karen Clyne, Ryan Mucatel, Joe Flores and Michelle Rios, Exec. VPs

32 years young, MWWPR is an independent full-service agency with nine offices across the US and the UK. MWWPR is a “people-first” agency, committed to investing in best-in-class recruitment, employee development and retention, and overall agency morale. MWWPR continues to develop its proprietary research of the CorpSumerm, a growing segment of the population (nearly 100 million Americans — more than Millennials and Moms!) that exists at the intersection of Consumer Marketing, Corporate Reputation and Public Affairs. MWWPR is driven by the philosophy that the CorpSum is the evolution of public relations in that these components

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Continued from page 75
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can no longer operate in silos, as
Corporations increasingly value
corporate reputation to determine
consumer behaviors such as the
companies they purchase from, invest in, do business with, and
work for. In 2018, MWWPR was
named as the Best PR Agency by
NJBJZ where the firm was found-
ed, as well as the Top Independent
Consultancy by the International
Communications Consultancy
Organization (ICCO) for the third
consecutive year.

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O’Malley Hansen Communications
infuses the high quality of big
firm work with the focused client
service and cutting-edge strategy
that only a nimble, independently
owned strategic communications
agency can offer. We create dy-
namic programs that drive positive
conversations to ensure our clients
are heard clearly and consistently.
Our approach breaks through a
noisy market with an understand-
ing that brand equity and reputa-
tion are built by endorsement from
a range of influencers who receive
information from a variety of
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Chris Rosica, President

Rosica Communications is an integrated PR and online market-
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people. Founded in 1980, the firm serves a diverse healthcare, B2B,
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As a “thinking partner” focused on achieving our clients’ objec-
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- Continued on page 80
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Founded in 2008, Weiss PR, Inc. helps companies and non-profit organizations to reach, engage, and influence the right audiences in order to achieve their communications and business objectives.

Staffing accounts exclusively with senior-level executives who have a minimum of 10 years of public relations experience, Weiss PR has developed a strong reputation for getting positive results for clients by using an integrated communications approach that includes media and influencer relations, social media, marketing services, and issues management — all anchored by strategic communications planning.

Weiss PR’s clients are concentrated in five industry sectors: commercial real estate (including architecture, construction, development, and engineering); employee benefits and healthcare; non-profits; professional services; and technology. In addition, the firm has extensive experience in crisis communications, including strategy development and rapid response implementation for both corporations and individuals.

In spite of its rapid growth and assignments throughout the U.S. and internationally (including clients in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Israel, and Iceland, and work throughout Europe and the Middle East), Weiss PR has stayed true to its vision to provide client’s with ideas built on strategy — not egos — from a team of senior public relations professionals who are committed to providing exceptional service, great work, and measurable results.

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Zapwater Communications, Inc. is an award-winning public relations agency specializing in consumer, hospitality, travel and lifestyle brands. Founded in 2005, Zapwater has grown into one of the premier creative communications firms in the United States.

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The oxymoron of ‘legal ethics’

By Fraser Seitel

If you’ve ever wondered which party is more “ethical,” public relations professionals or lawyers, the answer can be summarized in two words: Jussie Smollett.

The obscure actor, purportedly “accosted” by MAGA hat-wearing racist homophobes on the frigid streets of Chicago, is back in the news. First, the city of Chicago sued Smollett, seeking to recover more than $130,000 for costs related to the investigation of the actor’s dubious complaint. Then, Kim Foxx, the embattled Cook County Attorney, called for the county’s inspector general to review how her office handled—or if you’re so inclined, “mishandled”—the case.

Regardless of how the lawsuit or the investigation turn out, the Smollett case has already yielded nourishing lessons for public relations professionals, specifically highlighting the differences in the counsel offered by PR people compared to lawyers.

Assume for a moment that the actor, as the Chicago police charged, hired two African American associates to “attack” him, and then lied about it. Here, then, are the key questions that client Smollett faced and how his handling of them might’ve been different, had he consulted savvy PR advisors rather than ethically-challenged attorneys.

What happened?

This is the first question an attorney asks a client. The client then tells the lawyer what went on, and generally, the attorney leaves it at that and accepts the explanation. The reason a lawyer doesn’t probe is that he or she is forbidden to tell a judge or jury that the client didn’t do something the lawyer knows he did.

That’s why when they asked Alan Dershowitz whether he thought his client, O.J. Simpson, was guilty, the Harvard lawyer famously answered, “I didn’t ask, because that wasn’t my job.”

In Smollett’s case, of course, the actor claimed he was attacked by two white men, and his lawyers ran with it.

Had a PR professional been on hand, the question wouldn’t have been, “What happened?” but rather, “What did you do?” Public relations people must probe more deeply to determine if the client is telling the truth. If you think your client is lying, then you risk losing your own credibility by defending his innocence.

Accordingly, a savvy PR person would’ve had real trouble defending Smollett’s flimsy claim that he had been attacked. His lawyers, of course, suffered no such pangs of guilt. After a grand jury indicted Smollett for arranging the whole thing, the actor’s lawyer said, “Like any citizen, Mr. Smollett enjoys the presumption of innocence, particularly when there has been an investigation, like this one where information, both true and untrue, has been leaked.”

What’s the worst case?

One essential responsibility for a PR person is to present the client with a “worst case” analysis. In other words, determine, in advance, what’s the worst thing that can happen.

In Smollett’s case, the worst thing that could happen was that he’d be found out to be lying about the attack, thus committing a crime, destroying his reputation and imperiling his career.

Had a public relations advisor been consulted before Smollett’s cockamamie stunt, the actor might’ve been talked out of risking everything on such a hare-brained idea. After the fact, a PR advisor would’ve cautioned the actor to tell the truth and show contrition, rather than continuing to follow his lawyers’ advice to insist on his innocence.

What’s the right thing to do?

“Doing the right thing” is the ultimate public relations mantra.

A lawyer advises you on what you must do to stay out of jail. In Smollett’s case, his attorneys—with a head-scratching assist from County Attorney Foxx—successfully got the charges dropped. In response, Smollett’s lawyers continued to declare, “The case is closed … Mr. Smollett, like every citizen, is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.”

A PR professional, on the other hand, doesn’t tell you what you “must” do but rather what you “should” do to defend yourself in the Court of Public Opinion; there’s a big difference. In Smollett’s case, the “right” thing to do, especially after the case was thrown out, would have been to admit what happened, take responsibil-
Is your time to plan for retirement running out?

By Richard Goldstein

It occurred to me that many of the PR pros I’ve worked with over the years are now approaching retirement age. This could be one reason why there’s been a recent uptick in merger and acquisition activity.

Unfortunately, many PR agency owners are so wrapped up in the day-to-day affairs of operating their companies, they give little thought to their own financial needs. Many of these executives anticipate maintaining at least the same lifestyle during retirement that they enjoy today, perhaps even a better one.

As time goes by, you’re faced with the question: “Will I really have enough to live on?” And where will the money come from? Is selling your agency the answer to this question?

There’s a real need to control the future and not simply look forward to it! Even if you’re 31 as opposed to 51 or 61!

Pieces of the nest egg

Most business people have four basic types of assets that can be used to create a retirement fund: Social Security; savings or a retirement plan through business; investments; and proceeds from the sale of a business interest. Together, these sources should make up a hefty nest egg. But it takes a closer look to understand what they really provide.

Social Security depends largely on the size of your pre-retirement income. Even at higher salary levels Social Security falls short, providing a fraction of the total amount needed.

A pension or profit-sharing plan may provide a third or half of the income you’ll need, and you have to depend on it being there. In addition, you may be able to take advantage of other tax-favored vehicles, such as a 401(k) plan or an IRA to supplement your business’ retirement plan. As for personal investments: have you allowed enough time for your investment to achieve the desired result need to retire? The longer you delay your long-term investment planning, the larger your regular contributions to your investments will have to be.

When is the time to sell?

If you’re nearing retirement age, you may want to generate income for your interest in your agency. Although selling may seem the simplest solution, the cash you receive represents only part of the value of your business.

Let’s assume you want the business to continue. Maybe you want to keep the business in the family. There are two basic issues that need to be considered. First, a family member will need to be a PR professional with the requisite experience and desire to buy your business. Second, where will the money come from to buy your agency? In my view, this probably isn’t the best solution.

A better solution would be to “shop” your agency. There are many professionals who can guide you through this process. If you decide to go this route, there are many questions to consider:
1. Will a buyer be available when you are ready to retire?
2. Will the buyer have the necessary funds or the ability to finance the transaction?
3. Will you be able to agree on a selling price?
4. Will the price generate the income you will need in retirement?

At this point, it would be a good idea to pursue various planning options with your financial advisors: your CPA, attorney, financial planner and insurance agent.

When you do this, there are a few fundamental guidelines to keep in mind: 1. Use realistic planning assumptions. Don’t ignore the eroding effect of inflation or the growth potential of interest.
2. Reduce or consider taxes on money going into and coming out of your retirement plan.
3. Plan for unexpected events according to their consequences, not just their likelihood.
4. Use your business wherever possible to fund benefits with business dollars.

You should also be sure that adequate provisions are made for possible ill health or accident that include disability insurance and long-term care insurance in your planning.

Additional thoughts on selling (mergers)

According to the late Al Croft, “mergers have become a normal part of the life-cycle of PR firms. In addition to bolstering management, they may provide greater opportunity for both parties with minimum risk. Nowadays, involvement in merger discussions usually is a sign of agency strength, not weakness. Almost all professionally managed mergers are at least reasonably successful.”

When to think about merger

Well, it’s never too early to think about merger. At the very least, you should discuss any promising opportunities that come your way. These talks can be very educational even if they’re ultimately not successful. Properly and professionally run, it requires only a small investment of time, money and emotion. They never should distract or disrupt agency management, and they shouldn’t be allowed to drag on inconclusively.

If you’ve reached the age of 55 and your business has leveled off, you should begin to consider merger. Most potential partners want to join forces with a dynamic firm, and—fair or unfair—age is a factor in this perception. Each year that passes usually reduces your firms’ attractiveness to a merger partner.

Don’t even consider selling and walking away. At the very least, you’ll have to stay several years—at least three—to fulfill the terms of the merger. According to Al Croft, numerous PR firm executives have found that once they’ve unloaded part of the burden of top management, they can become an elder statesperson and do the kind of PR work they truly enjoy.

PR news brief

Digitization PR’s top challenge

Providing adequate services in an increasingly digital world remains one of PR firms’ greatest goals and challenges, according to a survey of member agencies by global agency network International Public Relations Network.

The survey, which sought to provide insights regarding how PR agencies are adapting to new trends, found that nearly three quarters of respondents (74 percent) cited integrating digital communication as the single biggest challenge they currently face.

The survey also discovered that more than half (58 percent) believe digitalization, including the use of new technologies and an increase in online media, is the biggest change they see shaping the future PR landscape.

Nearly all (95 percent) of the agencies polled said they now offer some form of digital service, be it through internal digital teams or via partner agencies. Three quarters (75 percent) of agencies said they currently have an in-house digital department.

Despite the increasingly digital landscape, however, half of respondents (50 percent) said they still plan to bolster their traditional PR toolkits within their agency, citing skills like media relations, press release writing, feature and opinion leader content, and influencer relations.


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NRA sues Ackerman McQueen, Mercury Group

The National Rifle Association has sued long-time ad agency Ackerman McQueen and its Mercury Group PR unit for allegedly failing to turn over its business records to justify its billings. The organization paid Ackerman McQueen more than $42 million in 2017.

According to the suit filed in Virginia Circuit Court, the NRA “requested access to material, readily available records that Ackerman and Mercury are contractually obligated to provide,” but the defendants refused to provide them.

The gun group claims it negotiated with AM for access to the records for the better part of a year and its patience has now run out.

It wants business records including “budgets purportedly approved by the NRA, copies of material contracts for which the NRA is purportedly liable, and readily available performance data—all to inform the judgment of its fiduciaries.”

AM dismissed the suit as “frivolous, inaccurate and intended to cause harm to the reputation of our company.”

The Oklahoma City-based shop said in a statement: “We will defend our position and performance aggressively and look forward to continuing to serve the NRA’s membership.”

Cannabis group taps VS Strategies

Cannabis Trade Federation Action has hired VS Strategies to promote its mission to educate DC policymakers and advocate for a sensible marijuana public policy.

VSS will also focus on legislation impacting the operation of the state-legal cannabis industry including the SAFE Banking Act, Marijuana Revenue and Regulations Act, RE-SPECT Resolution, Marijuana Justice Act and the Responsibility Addressing the Marijuana Policy Gap Act.

VS is the public affairs wing of Denver-based Vicente Sederberg LLC, which Rolling Stone dubbed “the country’s first powerhouse marijuana law firm.”

Steve Fox, of counsel to Vicente Sederberg, spearheads the D.C. lobbying push for CTFA.

In 2005, he co-founded Safer Alternative for Enjoyable Recreation group to change the mindset of Colorado voters that marijuana is more harmful than alcohol.

He authored Marijuana is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink.

Venn Strategies Advocates Opioid Alternatives

Addiction prevention coalition Voices for Non-Opioid Choices has retained political and public affairs shop Venn Strategies to handle health issues on Capitol Hill.

D.C.-based Voices for Non-Opioid Choices is dedicated to combatting America’s opioid crisis by increasing awareness and access to FDA-approved non-opioid options and therapies to help manage patients’ post-surgery pain.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices has hired Venn Strategies to communicate issues relating to increasing patient and provider access to non-opioid approaches for acute pain management, according to lobbying registration documents filed with Congress in April.

A five-person team manages the account, including Tyler Roberts, former legislative assistant to Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and staffer to Reps Roy Blunt (R-MO), Joe Barton (R-TX) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE); Claire Badger, a former State Department staffer who was later associate director to the Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee; and Kelly Ferguson, former staffer to Reps. Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Paul Gosar (R-AZ).

HHS suspends Porter Novelli’s GOP-linked pacts

The Health and Human Services Administration slates a review of subcontracting deals flowing from Porter Novelli’s $2.25 million contract with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Politico reported March 29 that money from the PR contract went to Republican consultants to burnish the image of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma.

Pam Stevens, a media adviser, coached Verma; Marcus Barlow wrote speeches and devised strategy; while Nahigan Strategies’s staffers traveled with the administrator and helped orchestrate announcements, according to Politico.

HHS notified relevant congressional committees on April 3 that the contracts are suspended pending the review and audit by the inspector general.

Glover Park Co-founder forms Breakwater

Arik Ben-Zvi, a founder of Glover Park Group, has launched Breakwater Strategy, which will be part of WPP. From New York and D.C. offices, Breakwater will offer crisis management, positioning, thought leadership and public advocacy services.

Ben-Zvi, who served on the advance team of Al Gore’s 2000 campaign before helping to launch GPG in 2001, formed Breakwater with the goal of “once again experimenting with new ways to be a trusted strategic advisor to companies navigating today’s ever more chaotic and complex operating environment.”

GPG alum Max Gleischman will head the NYC outpost. He served as Communications Director to Samantha Power during her tenure as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.
Zimbabwe Bolsters Trump Ties

Zimbabwe has hired Avenue Global Strategies to a $1.1 million, one-year contract, which went into effect April 5, to foster better relations with the U.S.

Barry Bennett, who was a Senior Advisor to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, helms and co-founded AGS. He joined Team Trump after working as Presidential Campaign Manager for Ben Carson, now Dept. of Housing and Urban Development Secretary, and organizer of the 2012 Super PAC of Rick Perry, now Energy Secretary.

Zimbabwe in March inked Brian Ballard’s Ballard Partners to a two-year contract valued at $1 million. Ballard led Florida’s Trump Victory fundraising group.

The firm’s job is to encourage a re-examination of Zimbabwe from the State Dept. with a view of “establishing the best possible bilateral relationship with the U.S. and facilitating the restoration of Zimbabwe’s membership in the good standing with the community of nations.”

His firm is to arrange cultural exchanges between the two countries and meet with American business leaders to promote investment in Cambodia.

The U.S. established full diplomatic relations with Cambodia in 1993. U.S. foreign assistance to Cambodia accounted for 28 percent of its national budget in 2016, according to the State Dept.

H+K touts Georgia’s ‘tremendous economic opportunities’

H+K will assist the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia with outreach to U.S. lawmakers, businesses and selected groups as it works to attract investment and boost trade.

Outreach may include print, TV and digital advertising. Georgia has agreed to shell out $1.1 million for paid media production and placement services.

The WPP unit will conduct opinion research, forge coalitions, organize roadshows, do media relations and reach out to state governments on behalf of its client.

Cambodia Signs PacRim Bridges

Cambodia has given a $500,000 one-year contract to PacRim Bridges, which is fronted by two Washington state politicos, to improve its relations with the U.S.

Sen. Doug Ericksen visited Cambodia in July to observe the country’s elections, which NGOs criticized as a sham and featured a government crackdown on political opponents.

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.


BGR Government Affairs, LLC, Washington, D.C., registered Apr. 5, 2019 for Hong Kong Trade Development Council, New York, NY, regarding strategic advice and government relations assistance with respect to US foreign policies.

Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP. Denver, CO, registered Apr. 5, 2019 for Royal Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Washington, D.C., regarding government relations services and strategic counsel on matters before the US government.

Beacon Policy Advisors LLC. Washington, D.C., registered Apr. 9, 2019 for Embassy of Japan, Washington, D.C., regarding legislation in Congress and actions and policies of the US executive branch.

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.


S-3 Group, Washington, D.C., registered Apr. 25, 2019 for Third Option Foundation, Reston, VA, regarding issues related to members of the CIA’s Special Operations community and their families.


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