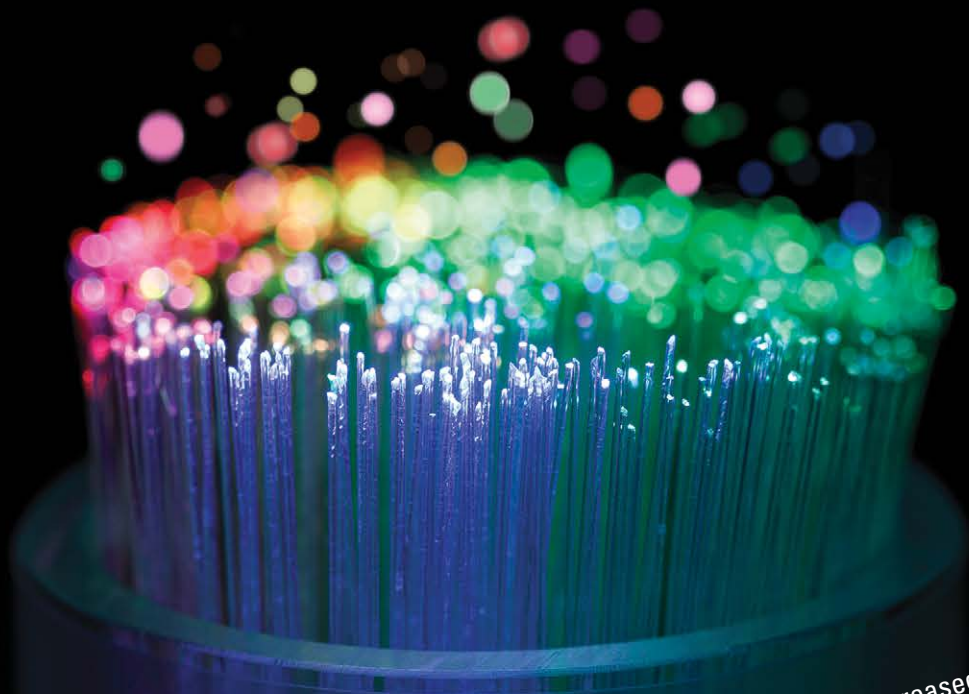


# O'Dwyer's

Communications & New Media

Nov. 2020 | Vol. 34 No. 7



## THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

Eight markets weathering the COVID-19 economy

Earned + owned media to boost tech PR

B2C communications in a B2B world

How communications helps fundraising

Tech trendjacking in the coronavirus news cycle

Why brands are at increased risk for online attack

Building technology thought leaders

Why fake news will wage on in 2021

Approaches for data-driven storytelling

Understanding election emotions through AI

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## EDITORIAL

**GOOGLE, FACEBOOK TAKE BITE OF OUT OF LOCAL NEWS**  
Abusive practices from tech giants could kill off local news sources.

**REPORTERS NEED PR PROS NOW MORE THAN EVER**  
The pandemic hasn't reduced journalists' hunger for PR sources.

**BRANDS AT BIGGER RISK FROM ONLINE ATTACKS**  
Negative comments about companies have strong effects.

**THE WAY TO APPROACH DATA-DRIVEN STORYTELLING**  
Why now's to time to explore data-driven storytelling.

**EARNED + OWNED MEDIA COMBO LIFTS TECH PR**  
How corporate blogging is making a comeback.

**MAKING THE CASE FOR B2C IN A B2B WORLD**  
How B2B marketing can profit from a consumer-facing approach.

**TECH TRENDJACKING AND THE COVID NEWS CYCLE**  
PRs pros from both sides of the Atlantic gauge industry trends.

**COVID-19 WILL BE 2021'S NUMBER-ONE TOPIC**  
The pandemic will stay top of mind for consumers next year.

**BUILDING TECH THOUGHT LEADERS, BRAND BY BRAND**  
How technology brands can find and define compelling stories.

**FOUR WAYS PR CAN HELP FUNDRAISING**  
Media relations campaigns can raise the value of tech startups.

**MARKETS WEATHERING THE COVID ECONOMY**  
Some tech sectors that saw increased investment in 2020.

6 24  
8 28  
8 30  
9 32  
10 34  
12 35  
14 36  
16 44  
17 45  
18 48  
20 46  
22 47

**THE NEXT BEST THING IS BEING BETTER TOGETHER**  
How tech leaders can join forces to support the greater good.

**TECHLAB: A TECH-FIRST VISION FOR COMMS**  
Helping companies keep up with the ever-changing tech reset.

**PR'S SECRET SAUCE: DATA-DRIVEN STORYTELLING**  
Knowing what audiences want is key to telling compelling stories.

**UNDERSTANDING ELECTION EMOTIONS THROUGH AI**  
Steps leaders can take to avoid an employee election meltdown.

**WHERE'S YOUR USP?**  
Your unique selling proposition should be the crown jewel of your PR and marketing campaigns.

**FAKE NEWS WILL LIVE ON IN THE POST-ELECTION WORLD**  
Few journalists think the election's outcome will affect the problem.

**PROFILES OF TECHNOLOGY PR FIRMS**

**PEOPLE IN PR**

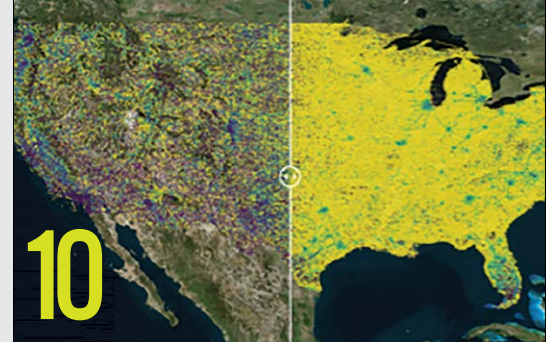
**RANKINGS OF TOP TECH PR FIRMS**

**WASHINGTON REPORT**

## COLUMNS

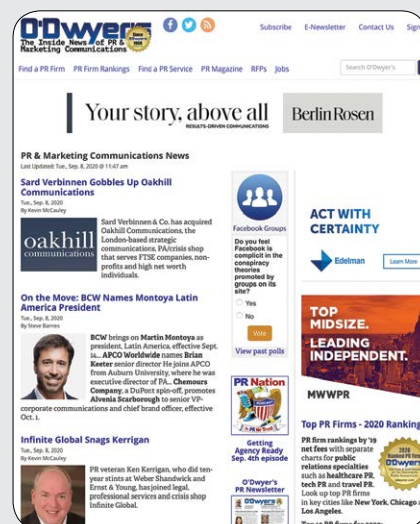
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October: Healthcare & Medical

November: Technology & Social Media

## ADVERTISERS

5W Public Relations .....	3
Burson Cohn & Wolfe .....	5
Current Global .....	Back Cover
Edelman .....	26, 27
Feintuch Communications .....	9
Finn Partners .....	7

Firecracker .....	23
Hoffman .....	19
Hotwire .....	Inside Front Cover
ICR .....	33
Inkhouse .....	11
LaunchSquad .....	21

Padilla .....	31
PAN Communications, Inc. ....	13
Peppercomm .....	15
Profile Advisors LLC .....	25
Ruder Finn .....	29





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## Trump Admin. touts science, tech accomplishments

There is no question that Donald Trump, who dismisses climate change as a hoax cooked up by China and famously suggested that drinking disinfectants may be a way to cure COVID-19, presides over the most anti-science White House that this nation has ever seen.

Since up is down and down is up in Trump Land, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy issued a press release on October 27 to tout “a selection of significant investments, accomplishments, policies, and other actions undertaken by President Trump to advance science and technology.”

It is a doozy and ranks as one of the worst press releases that I have seen in my more than 30-year run at *O'Dwyer's*. The release lacks details and says nothing.

“President Trump has solidified America’s standing as the most scientifically and technologically advanced nation the world has ever known,” the document reads. “We have achieved a proud record of results, and under President Trump’s leadership, science and technology will continue to inspire us, unite us, and guide us to ever greater progress.”

Among other accomplishments, the White House Science and Tech squad hails the twitter-in-chief for “ending” the COVID-19 pandemic and the “decisive actions” Trump has taken “to engage scientists and health professionals in academia, industry, and government to understand, treat, and defeat the disease.”

That “accomplishment” is a tad premature as the virus killed 1,016 Americans on Oct. 29 and infected more than 80,000 others.

A House subcommittee on the handling of the COVID-19 released a report on October 30 calling it “among the worst failures of leadership in American history” and an “American fiasco.”

There is another section in the White House release called “Understanding Our Planet” that is a real head-scratcher.

It credits Trump’s leadership for taking “action to understand and protect our environment to ensure that the American people will have clean air, clean water and a resilient environment for generations to come.” That word salad is meaningless gobbledeygook.

I don’t know what planet the S&T office is talking about but on Earth their guy transformed the Environmental Protection Agency into a clubhouse for fossil fuel lobbyists and moved to trash the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Trump also never stumbled upon an Obama era environmental regulation that he liked.

But the following quote is the kicker:

“Over the past four years, President Trump’s policies and investments in science and technology ensure America stands ready to solve today’s most pressing challenges and that our workforce is prepared for tomorrow’s innovations. For years to come, these achievements will guarantee the United States remains the world’s leader in research, discovery and the advancement of industries that will shape our future.”

Those hollow words are attributed to none other than Ivanka Trump, one-time weekend teen model and marketer of Chinese-made clothing and shoes who must have a couple of high school science classes under her fashionable belt.

Melania must have been too busy that day to sing the praises of hubby.

The inclusion of Ivanka makes a joke about the “Advancing America’s Global Leadership in Science and Technology: Trump Administration Highlights: 2017-2020” report.

But that might be the point of the Trump administration scientists who toughed out four years of the White House’s absolute indifference to science and embracement of off-the-wall nonsense.

Here’s hoping that in the coming years, they can work to restore the integrity of America in the global scientific community. ○

— Kevin McCauley

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O'Dwyer's is published seven times a year for \$60.00 (\$7.00 a single issue) by the J.R. O'Dwyer Co., Inc.  
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New York, NY 10016.  
(212) 679-2471 Fax: (212) 683-2750.

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# Google, Facebook blamed for demise of local news

Unfair and abusive practices committed by tech giants has contributed to the death of local news outlets, according to a recent Congressional report.

By Kevin McCauley

Local newspapers will all but vanish within five years, largely due to the unfair and abusive practices of tech platforms, according to a study from Democrats on the Senate Commerce Committee that calls for new Federal Trade Commission authority to protect endangered newspapers.

By the end of the five years, newspapers will have lost 70 percent of the revenue that they had in 2000. More than 40,000 newsroom jobs have been cut since 2005 and another 7,000 will be lost this year, leaving a workforce of about 30,000.

"Local news across America creates competition and trusted information," said Maria Cantwell, ranking Democrat on the Commerce Committee. "We shouldn't let regional and community news die as local newspapers and broadcasters adjust to digital delivery because online giants are unfairly leveraging the advertising market against

them."

Called "Local Journalism: America's Most Trusted News Sources Threatened," the Report notes that the mass transfer of content and advertising online, combined with the proliferation of news sites, has dramatically lowered ad value and siphoned dollars from local newspapers that produce the content supporting those ads.

Meanwhile, "local news has been hijacked by a few large news aggregation platforms, notably Google and Facebook, which have become the dominant players in online advertisers. These trillion-dollar companies scrape local news content and data for their own sites and leverage the market dominance to force local news to accept little to no compensation or their intellectual property."

The Report says Congress and the FTC should work to ensure fair return for local

news content.

They should require news aggregation platforms to enter into good faith negotiations with local news organizations and pay them fair market value for their content.

Local news organizations should also be able to collectively bargain for reuse of their content, provided there are strong controls in place to ensure that smaller publishers are not left behind.

The Report calls for rules to prevent unfair, deceptive, and abusive practices to stop platforms from taking local news content without financial payment and retaliating against local news by hiding or removing their content from search engines or social media feeds.

Each of these changes should be crafted in a way to promote competition and consumer welfare and spur growth and innovation in the digital economy. ○

## Reporters need PR pros now more than ever

Financial and business journalists are using PR professionals as much or more than they did before the pandemic, according to a recent study.

By Steve Barnes

Reporters need PR pros more than ever, according to a new study from Prosek Partners. Close to all (95 percent) of the financial and business journalists who were surveyed said that they are using PR professionals as much or more than they did before the pandemic.

Part of that may stem from a difficulty in finding sources. A majority (61 percent) of survey respondents said that they are now finding it harder to develop connections with new sources, and half (50 percent) say that they are relying more on third-party sources than they did before.

There was also a significant desire to get back to pre-pandemic work habits. More than two-thirds (69 percent) said they plan to be in the office by the end of Q1 2021, with 26 percent saying they plan to be back at their desks by the end of the year.

But flexible working arrangements will still be a big draw, with 62 percent of respondents saying that they expect some or all of that flexibility to remain in place even after things return to normal.

As regards conducting interviews face-to-face as opposed to virtually, two thirds (67 percent) predict that they'll be comfortable with in-person interviews by March 2021, and 34 percent say they're comfortable with socially distanced in-person interviews

now. However, more than a quarter (26 percent) labeled in-person interviews "a thing of the past."

Respondents also expect that New York and London will maintain their status as financial and business news hubs. Well over half (62 percent) say that the two cities will either maintain or grow their level of importance after COVID.

## COVID-19 quickens newspaper industry's demise

By Jon Gingerich

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the newspaper industry, but not all sectors of the news media have been affected by the coronavirus downturn equally, according to Pew Research Center analysis.

Pew's report, which analyzed the performance of U.S. newspapers as well as cable and broadcast media outlets, found that median ad revenues fell 42 percent among the nation's six largest newspaper chains between 2019's second quarter and Q2 2020.

By contrast, ad revenues across the three major cable news networks (CNN, Fox News and MSNBC) held steady overall. And ad revenue across the five major local TV news companies analyzed (which comprises more than 600 news stations)

"New York City and London have long been recognized as influential, global media hubs and agencies and clients have organized themselves around these hubs," said Prosek Managing Partner Jennifer Prosek. "It's clear that these hubs will continue to prevail in the post-pandemic world."

Prosek's study surveyed 86 journalists between October 1 and 20. ○

was down during 2020's second quarter though retransmission fees during this period more than made up for those losses, according to the report. Meanwhile, ad revenue across the three major broadcast TV news networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) increased year-over-year.

The report also discovered that newspaper companies' revenues took a worse hit financially during 2020's second quarter than they did during the Great Recession a decade ago. Moreover, newspaper circulation revenue also dipped during 2020's second quarter by a median of eight percent.

Finally, the report found that digital ads, often seen as the newspaper industry's last financial hope, fell by a median of 32 percent between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020. ○



# Brands at increased risk for online attack

More than two-thirds of Americans think harmful or negative comments about companies or brands are on the rise online. Worse, a majority believe these attacks negatively reflect brands' values and admit they affect whether or not they'll purchase an item or service from that company.

By Jon Gingerich

In today's polarizing political climate, where everyone's an activist and brands find themselves vying for relevancy by aligning themselves with any number of contentious social causes, perhaps it's no surprise companies are now a common target for harassment and toxic content across social media platforms.

As a result, according to a report by early-warning risk intelligence provider Crisp, negative comments about brands or companies are surging online, causing untold damage to reputation and putting consumer brand loyalty at risk.

The report, which asked respondents how digital chatter and consumer comments online affect their purchasing behaviors, found that more than two-thirds of those polled (68 percent) reported witnessing a "significant rise" in the frequency of derogatory, offensive or hurtful comments about companies on brand-owned

social media pages.

More than half (51 percent) additionally said they've seen an uptick in negative comments on brand-sponsored ads running on social media sites.

Among the litany of negative comments that appear about companies or brands online, the most common are responses to a company's stance on COVID-19 (32 percent), followed by inappropriate comments about Black Lives Matter (32 percent), accusations of fraud (31 percent), accusations of inequality (26 percent) and accusations of discrimination (26 percent).

More than half of respondents (60 percent) said they're more likely to be skeptical of companies and their leaders as a result of harmful comments made about them online, regardless of whether or not those comments are true. 43 percent said they've decided not to purchase an item or service after encountering negative com-

ments about the company online.

More than half of consumers (60 percent) said they believe inappropriate or harmful comments reflect negatively on the values of that company or its leadership.

Only a quarter (25 percent) profess remaining indifferent to what people say about brands on social media.

A majority of consumers polled (64 percent) said they hold brands responsible for addressing any inappropriate or harmful content made on their social media pages. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) said they typically give brands an hour to address these comments. More than a quarter (28 percent) give brands 24 hours.

Only seven percent think waiting a week to respond is appropriate.

Crisp's "Brands at Risk" report surveyed 1,039 respondents in July. The survey was conducted by UK-based customer insight and analytics group STRAT7. ○

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# How to approach data-driven storytelling

Why now's the time to explore data-driven storytelling.

By Michelle Maggs

**W**rap your head around this: 2.5 quintillion bytes of data are produced by humans every day. A quintillion has 18 zeroes in it. 18! With that amount of information flying around, there's no limit to the number of stories we as communicators can share by extracting interesting data nuggets.

We're currently seeing a surge of data-driven storytelling in the media: outlets like *The Economist*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have dedicated data teams because data-led stories drive readership. We're also seeing it with our clients: marketing, communications and analytics teams are collaborating to identify compelling data-fueled stories that engage audiences and drive brand awareness.

Clients often ask us where to start, so here are three critical steps:

## Start with the story

As with all communications, it begins with the story. Sometimes clients ask for an infographic. Sure, an infographic might be the most relevant execution to communicate something, but we can't afford to bypass strategy and old-fashioned storytelling best practices.

First ask the fundamental questions: what are we trying to communicate, to whom and most importantly why? Examine the broader business, economic, technological or cultural context and understand what your audience cares about. We also must consider what you as a business care about. Where those elements overlap is the story you want to tell.

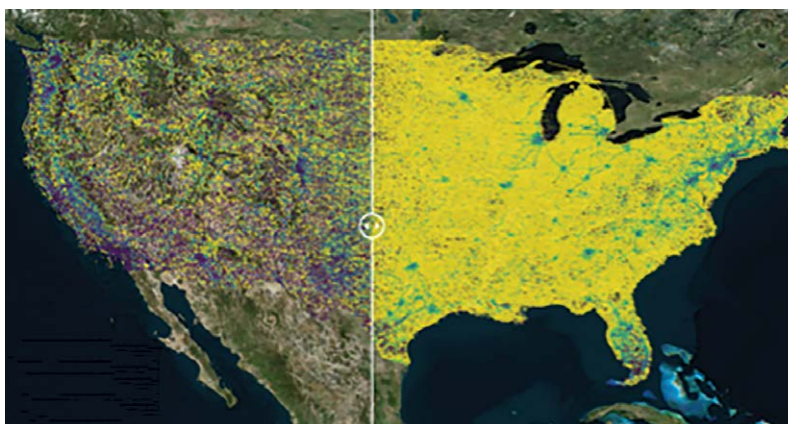
## Identify the proper data source

Armed with that story idea in mind, you can begin to think about the data needed grab the audience's attention while also supporting the key messages you want to convey. Data can be extracted from myriad sources: internal datasets, external platforms, social media conversations, media coverage analyses, quantitative surveys, audience engagement figures, the list goes on and on.

With the story hypothesis defined, you can determine whether you have the proper datasets internally, whether they are avail-

able within the public domain, or whether you need to create a bespoke piece of quantitative or qualitative research.

If you're creating research, remember that to ensure you get pithy, cut-through findings, your skills as a communicator are essential throughout the process. This includes everything from designing the research to actually going through the raw data set. Engaging a team of data experts, communications experts and marketing leads ensures you have the perspectives you need to confidently and effectively tell the stories you want to tell. Often when you're presented with a dataset, it's easy to become overwhelmed. Don't be. Sometimes a compelling story—or even an entire campaign—can be built around one or two stats.



**Example of INRIX data visualization shared with media. The image on the left reflects the lower than usual traffic movement at the height of lockdown, while the image on the right shows the impact once lockdowns began lifting.**

## Create a compelling visualization

Next comes the fun part: visualization of the images that will bring the data to life. There are some incredibly powerful data visualizations out there: coronavirus, the aging population, every solar eclipse happening in your lifetime. But don't feel intimidated. Compelling visualizations can come in a variety of methods, and simple bar graphs and scatter plots can be as effective as interactive and immersive animated images.

## Using data to communicate COVID-19's impact on traffic

We've been fortunate to work with our client INRIX, a leader in transportation and mobility intelligence, for many years. Due to the inherent nature of the INRIX busi-

ness, it has access to an abundance of data analytics of value to governments, businesses and consumers alike: everything from real-time traffic and parking information and solutions, signal and roadway analytics, traffic speeds and volumes and more.

As the penetration of COVID-19 began to increase across the United States, INRIX recognized an opportunity to share compelling insights into how mobility behaviors were shifting due to the pandemic. Together, we worked with INRIX on a series of reports on congestion trends across the country, looking at the data trends, identifying the most news-



**Michelle Maggs**

worthy and relevant angles, and distributing stunning visualizations of the analytics to media over the course of six weeks.

The weekly U.S. national traffic volume reports became "must reads" for reporters already covering mobility, transportation and infrastructure, and they extended the reach and relevance of INRIX to new media contacts and audiences in every major business, technology, trade and daily news organization in the country.

As a result, INRIX transportation analysts have participated in more than 100+ local and national media interviews, INRIX data has been referenced and its analysts quoted in hundreds of articles, and the heightened brand exposure has had a direct effect on lead generation growth and sales.

Data is a powerful aid when it comes to communications. From the initial strategic approach to designing the visualization and ultimately distributing the data-driven story through earned or owned channels, we're helping clients maximize this opportunity.

Is this your moment to explore data-driven storytelling? We're ready to help.

*Michelle Maggs is Executive Vice President and Global Technology Lead at Current Global. ○*





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# Earned + owned media combo lifts tech PR

How corporate blogging is making a comeback.

By Lou Hoffman

To understand if owned media should be part of your PR efforts, answer the following question:

Does the media cover every pitch, news release and positive story from your company or client?

Even the glamour tech giants—think an Intel, an Amazon and the like—can't say yes to this question. Everyone wants greater media attention. Owned media—specifically, corporate blogging—offers a way to accentuate your earned media efforts and more.

For those who might be thinking that blogging's time has come and gone—or to borrow from the French: “blogging, it's so passé”—some historical context is in order.

## BusinessWeek cover story

Corporate blogging began to gain traction shortly after the dot-com meltdown 20 years ago. A 2005 *BusinessWeek* (no Bloomberg yet, still owned by McGraw Hill) cover story proclaimed, “Blogs Will Change Your Business.” The story couldn't have been clearer about the stakes with this onerous passage: “Look past the yakkers, hobbyists and political mobs. Your customers and rivals are figuring blogs out. Our advice: Catch up ... or catch you later.”

Still, tech companies perceived corporate blogging as a platform for fluff. Introducing a vegan option in the company cafeteria? Throw it up on the blog. The finance department uses Rubik's cubes as a team-building exercise. Write it up for the blog.

That changed in 2010 when Google announced on its corporate blog the decision to exit from the China market. Here was Google, one of the most influential companies in the tech sector, communicating a piece of news that would forever change its trajectory, and they chose a blog post. Not at a press event. Not in a news release. The action gave street cred to corporate blogging.

Yet, it wasn't that much later the media reported that companies were throwing in the towel on corporate blogging. A 2012 *USA Today* headline flatly stated: “More Companies Quit Blogging, Go with Facebook Instead.” Huh?

This is the danger of assigning headline writing to interns. Still, the intern didn't come up with the ludicrous premise that Facebook has replaced blogging as the new shiny thing for directly communicating with the outside world.

Fast forward to today, progressive PR teams—consultancy as well as in-house—are investing in owned media in a way that

it becomes intertwined with traditional PR tactics. That's how you gain synergy and boost earned media.

Debating whether to call it blogging, in-house publishing or a derivative misses the point. Sending quality information—defining quality as educational, insightful, amusing or a combination—to your target audiences never goes out of style. I'm going to continue using the term “blogging” as a catch-all for any form of online publishing controlled by the company.

## How does owned media increase earned media?

Today's journalists view corporate blogs as a credible source to supplement and even drive their stories.

For proof of this game-changing dynamic, plug the phrase [said in a blog post] into the Google news engine. Conducting this search on Oct. 21 at 10:22 a.m. brings up TechCrunch, the *New York Times*, the *New York Post* and the *Washington Post* with stories that tapped blog posts from Vitable Health, Google, Amazon and Microsoft.

Lest you think this is a cheap parlor trick, the same search on the tech-focused publication, *The Verge*, again pulls up stories which leverage blog posts ranging from Starbucks to Western Digital, a B2B tech company that toils outside the bright lights.

How do you capitalize on this dynamic? How does your company/client become a virtual source with the objective of generating incremental media coverage?

The answer lies in thought leadership, the de rigueur linchpin for tech PR as the Internet continues to commoditize news announcements on products. Write blog posts that deliver fresh perspectives on industry issues, ideally those that already have a high profile in the media. This way, you can reach out to relevant journalists with a pointer to the blog post as they continue to explore the issue.

For example, we support Nokia's B2B business. In the early days of the pandemic when the Internet experienced a spike of usage, Nokia published several blog posts that quantified the amount of extra usage as well as provided a perspective on how the Internet was holding up and even the likelihood of “breaking.” This owned media morphed into earned media in *Wired*, Bloomberg and the list goes on.

Furthermore, by optimizing each post with on-page SEO, you increase the likelihood that journalists you didn't pitch will discover the post through their own online

searches. You can find the perfect proof point in a story from *The Street* (May 26, 2018) on Tesla CEO Elon Musk's tweets damaging the company's reputation on Wall Street. Dive into the copy and you'll come across my commentary thanks to a blog post.

## The qualities of a valuable source still apply

Stepping back for a moment, consider what prompts a journalist to perceive a source as valuable. The source delivers a fresh point of view, often running counter to the conventional way of thinking. The source pushes the discourse into unexpected terrain. The source helps the journalist to view the issue in a different light.

The same high bar applies to owned media and publishing thought leadership posts. Unfortunately, many—especially those from B2B tech companies—treat corporate blogs like a sales channel with self-promotion trumping critical thinking. These same companies end up baffled that no one, much less journalists, pay attention to their content.

But if you do it right, beyond generating incremental media coverage, you're cultivating a digital pulpit that allows you to directly counter inaccurate information and even fight back if the situation calls for it. Which brings us back to Google.

In response to the Department of Justice filing an antitrust lawsuit against Google in October, the company didn't distribute a news release or send out executives on a charm offensive. No doubt you've already jumped to the punch line. Google published a blog post headlined “A Deeply Flawed Lawsuit That Would Do Nothing to Help Consumers,” outlining dot-connecting logic on why the DOJ is off base.

Here we are 10 years since Google communicated plans to exit China on its blog, and the company is using the same playbook. Did it work? While it's too early to know how the antitrust lawsuit will play out, the blog post has definitely inserted Google's voice into media stories.

Yet, you don't need to be of Google stature to parlay owned media into earned media. Just think like a journalist.

Lou Hoffman is CEO of the Hoffman Agency, a tech-focused consultancy specializing in global campaigns. The firm operates offices in Asia, Europe and the U.S. ○



Lou Hoffman



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# Making the case for B2C in a B2B world

How B2B marketing can broaden its horizons by adopting a more consumer-facing approach.

By Alexis Blais

To communicate a company's story effectively to the right audiences, most industry professionals would say aligning sales, marketing and PR should be a top priority. As is widely understood, marketing message consistency is key to success.

B2B tech marketing is no exception to this best practice. But when consistency meets complacency, PR has a problem.

B2B tech marketing, with its emphasis on lead-gen from a niche market, has for years let lackluster creative and uninspiring sales messaging chock-full of industry jargon take the lead. With intentions to speak only to a select few, many marketing departments have become all too comfortable with campaigns that rarely spark emotion and end up falling flat.

As a result, B2B tech PR strategies have often followed suit. While alignment has ensured consistency, the practice of narrowing in on an outdated idea of who informs purchase decisions has confined PR strategies to parameters no longer necessary. Creativity falls to the wayside and teams end up speaking mostly to their own industry with stories that don't resonate, messaging that reads textbook and talking points that feel robotic. No matter a buyer's deep tech knowledge, no one wants marketing to feel like a lecture.

The majority of B2B marketing has lagged in creativity for far too long. Despite a laser focus on motivating the buyer, evidence shows much of B2B marketing is failing. A 2018 survey by marketing agency WMH found that 82 percent of business buyers wished B2B advertising had the creativity they expect from B2C advertising. Additionally, 48 percent of respondents shared that they feel B2B advertising is boring. Only 22 percent said the marketing they see actually leads them to making a purchase, and a whopping 81 percent believed they would make better purchasing decisions if B2B marketing engaged them more. Those are stats we can't ignore.

Recent trends support the idea that B2B marketing should broaden its horizons. Today especially, with digital adoption accelerating the way it has this year alone, consumers are savvier than ever when it comes to the technology inside their growing set of devices and the corporations behind the software they've become reliant on.

Not only that, employees—who are also

consumers, we must remember—are gaining purchasing power. The growth of workplace software, for example, has resulted in preference building among the rank and file. Just think about how many times you've argued among friends the pros and cons of Microsoft Teams vs. Slack.

It's become clear B2B marketing and its PR counterpart needs to reconsider who they reach and with what message.

There's precedent that demonstrates the power of reaching the end user. Take Stripe, for example, the payments company that allows businesses to accept money online. Knowing the pain of clunky payments infrastructure fell to developers, they went against traditional B2B marketing wisdom and took a developer-first approach, which supported their developer-first product. Rather than zero in on the Chief Financial Officers or purchasing managers of various online businesses, the way most B2B marketing strategies do, they spoke directly to the developer. Developers, in turn, became vocal evangelists. Messaging like "doesn't suck" resonated strongly because it was simple, digestible and refreshing. Rather than putting the onus on the C-Suite to decide what technology employees should use, Stripe marketing compelled developers themselves to advocate for the product to whomever needed to hear it. With a private valuation surpassing \$35 billion as they set their sights on the public markets, there's no question Stripe nailed it.

The alternative approach taken by Stripe—often referred to as B2B2C—isn't new. But with an increasingly savvy consumer having more and more say in the technology they use, its adoption is growing. The smartest companies have sharpened up, with case studies like Stripe helping to usher in change.

However, B2B tech PR hasn't properly caught up. We tend to pride ourselves on being able to understand dense, highly technical language, in order to communicate to our various audiences in ways we hope resonate. With that expertise, we can do more than be conduits of information to select audiences of what were traditionally seen as the all-important purchase manager.

B2B tech PR programs can go beyond the buyer to reach purchase influencers by challenging themselves to look past the tried-and-true playbook. This requires

looking at the assets we have through a new lens.

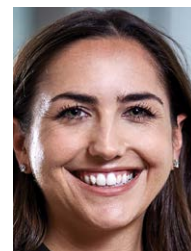
I was fortunate to begin my PR career focused on entirely-different sectors: fashion, beauty and entertainment. I've often had colleagues question the relation or find the career transition surprising, but it was actually quite smooth. When I started the shift into technology, I was asked in interviews how my experience could apply to this sector. With tech founders and executives at the time just beginning to become more widely known household names, I saw plenty of similarities to the flashy names I was used to promoting. In addition to the buzz-building and reputation-managing celebrity factor, those industries instilled a proactive, lofty-goal setting mentality. Thinking outside the box wasn't a once-in-a-while brainstorm session, it was a daily hustle. It seemed to me that B2B tech PR could use more hustle.

While B2B tech companies rarely have the sort of built-in buzz a celebrity does, carrying the consumer-facing approach in an effort to challenge the status quo can be a game changer.

All too often, quick and decisive assumptions are made about what's newsworthy. What's more, we've been trained to lean on standard practice—i.e., "we've always done it this way"—for reaching audiences through the media.

Take a common request from a tech executive to get a story placed in the *Wall Street Journal*, one of the country's most credible, prestigious and wide-reaching publications. Every tech startup wants a show piece feature or mention, and for good reason: the credibility of such association is invaluable. Knowing the challenging landscape, PR pros often point out the unrealistic likelihood of such a placement, suggesting resources be diverted elsewhere, like reaching the customer through trade publications or paid media.

In many ways, that counsel is appropriate, but it's not completely accurate. Unrealistic? Maybe, especially if frequency is expected. But never? Only if you're playing it safe. Connecting with your customer through the industry only, and reverting to paid? Of course, channeling resources appropriately and targeting the right audience



Alexis Blais

— Continued on page 17





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# Tech trendjacking: a global take on COVID's news cycle

Two members of the PAN Communications leadership team offer insights into what's changed and what's stayed the same when it comes to pitching in their respective markets during the COVID-19 crisis.

By Darlene Doyle

The past eight months have challenged communications professionals on a whole new level. In some ways, the work has never been more engaging and more rewarding as we help our clients navigate truly uncharted territory.

However, it has also required us to pause and evaluate how our current state of affairs has changed the media landscape, what stories resonate in today's environment and what falls flat. The fundamentals of what makes for a great story—and enticing trendjack—haven't changed. But the care and thoughtfulness in how we approach this has.

## Varying media strategies from across the pond

I've asked two members of our leadership team in the US and UK to provide insights into what has changed and what has stayed the same when it comes to pitching in their respective markets. In this article, Senior Vice President Nikki Festa and Managing Director UK Gareth Thomas dive into the nuances that communicators should consider as they approach media outreach across the globe.

## Isn't every story a COVID story? Are there other tech narratives that are still cutting through?

**Thomas:** Certainly COVID-19 continues to dominate the British media agenda, and there are many sub-themes highly relevant to tech brands. For example, the launch of the NHS Test and Trace app has fueled debate around data privacy, the explosion of cybercrime has heightened awareness of security and there is a compelling need to reskill workers whose jobs have evaporated.

Away from COVID, Brexit continues to rumble on as the UK scrambles to sign a trade deal by the end of 2020. Fintech companies are watching closely, whilst also responding to a slew of investigations from our financial watchdog, the FCA, and focusing on rebuilding trust in the wake of scandals around FinCEN or Wirecard.

The climate crisis also means interest in green tech remains strong. For example, the centerpiece of British PM Boris Johnson's Conservative Party conference speech in October was a pledge that offshore wind

farms will generate enough electricity to power every home in the UK within a decade.

**Festa:** In the early days of COVID, there were some obvious and immediate entry points to the broader media conversation. For example, managing a remote workforce, the impact on the supply chain, and the focus on security and remote learning dominated the US media.

As time has progressed, the intersection of COVID and the election environment has demanded even more care and thoughtfulness. The fundamentals haven't changed; trendjacking can't be self-serving or an advertisement for your product or service. However, today's environment has pushed even more focus on listening first and evaluating where our clients can bring value, education and solutions to the conversation.

Finally, we're seeing companies and their executives play a larger role in speaking out on broader global issues like the economy, systemic racism and climate change.

## Has COVID-19 changed the overall approach to trendjacking for technology brands?

**Thomas:** Journalists have always been intolerant of poorly thought-through trendjacks, and quite rightly so. But as many companies found in recent months, the bar has been set even higher in the face of a tidal wave of breaking news.

This has forced brands to move beyond offering opinions and canned quotes. Actions speak louder than words and there have been multiple examples of brands going beyond commentary to swiftly adapt their product or service (or release entirely new ones). They've then used their owned channels to highlight what they're doing to respond to the news agenda and why.

**Festa:** If your trendjack reads like an advertisement or ambulance chase, it will most definitely fall flat. The media is looking for provocative points of view and tangible customer success stories to support each narrative.

We have also seen more demand for commentary on broader social issues. Big companies typically shy away from these topics, but we're seeing

more and more leaders joining them.

## How can technology brands ensure they're sharing content that will be well received by media?

**Thomas:** Stick to what you know. Specific, niche commentary from experts goes down well, especially when supported with credible and proprietary data that can't be found elsewhere. If it's vague and generic, it won't make the cut.

If you don't have your own primary data, mining public data, making sense of it and highlighting trends is a smart option. With news desks stretched, comms. teams that do the legwork will be well received. We did this for a fintech client by looking at the lack of insurance refunds during lockdown and generated more than 250 articles.

When it comes to commentary, speedy, punchy and personal commentary, rather than an academic essay is likely to hit the mark. Some UK-based titles, like the FT-backed Sifted, for example, encourage a bit of humor too, and they welcome counter-narratives that go against the grain.

**Festa:** I couldn't agree more on supporting your content with data, facts and customer success stories. We talk about finding the white space—what the industry and your competitors are talking about, and what you can speak to that brings a new perspective to the conversation.

I also encourage clients to consider what stories stand out to them. Who are their trusted voices in the market—either in their space or another—and why does that person or company stand out? Sometimes that can help reinforce the kinds of stories and content that is really compelling to the media.

## With all the negative news in the media, is it possible for technology brands to trendjack with positive stories?

**Thomas:** Many people have bemoaned the incessant negativity of the news, and we have seen some examples of media trying to buck the trend. The BBC, for example, dedicated a full day during lockdown to positive news. Certainly, some journalists are interested in positive or inspiring cus-



Darlene Doyle



Gareth Thomas



Nikki Festa

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# COVID-19 vaccine is number-one topic for 2021

COVID-19 will remain top of mind for consumers in 2021, according to a USC Center for PR survey.

By Steve Barnes

**C**OVERID-19 will remain top of mind for consumers in 2021, according to a survey that is part of the USC Center for Public Relations' newly published 2021 Relevance Report.

Close to half (44.3 percent) of respondents listed a potential COVID-19 vaccine as a subject in which they are highly interested. Perhaps in response to quarantine living, food and recipes were the second-most-popular topics, cited by 21.8 percent of the respondents. Conducted in partnership with the Institute for Public Relations and Golin, the survey asked 1,087 Americans about the topics, products, brands and people that will be most relevant to them next year.

When it comes to where survey respondents go to express their opinions on social

issues, Facebook beats all comers, with 46.1 percent naming it as the platform they go to most often. Instagram came in second at 17 percent, and Twitter was favored by 10.9 percent.

With an eye towards life getting back to normal next year, 20.8 percent of respondents said they were looking forward to eating inside restaurants. Other activities, such as attending live concerts (11.9 percent), going to movie theaters (10.8 percent), going to the beach (9 percent) and traveling by air (8.2 percent) were somewhat less popular.

Trust was a major issue for survey respondents as well. Doctors were chosen as the most accurate, credible source of information by 18 percent, followed by journalists (10.5 percent) and educators (7.7 percent).

Only 2.4 percent said that public relations professionals were the most trusted source.

Amazon, Chick-fil-A and Apple ranked as the brands whose overall social engagement would make consumers most likely to support them in 2021. Amazon was the top retail brand (named by 28.9 of respondents), Chick-fil-A topped the quick-service restaurant category with 23.7 percent and Apple (18.9 percent) was the top retail brand.

"In a normal year, many different topics are relevant to Americans," said Fred Cook, Director of the USC Center for PR. "But in 2021, they will be paying closest attention to COVID-19, and it will continue to impact their lives. Information on the virus is what they will listen to, share with others and act upon." ●

## MAKING THE CASE FOR B2C

— Continued from page 14

makes sense, and there are certainly times for paid media. But not challenging oneself to find relevancy in mainstream earned media would be underestimating its massive brand- and credibility-building value.

B2B tech PR pros are used to keeping communications programs humming steadily, but the best practitioners are keeping an opportunistic eye on what else is out there for their product, service or business.

Rather than rest on our laurels for communicating complex messages to the niche

audiences who comprehend them, we should push ourselves to translate dense topics into stories that resonate more broadly.

PR pros are capable of wearing many different hats. This skillset should be extended to storytelling efforts, exploring how to find relevancy for a product or service based on what's in the zeitgeist, what's dominating the headlines or what's percolating on reporters' radars. Or rather than run from controversy, we should explore how to strategically embrace tension to get noticed beyond expected confines.

Instead of limiting our expertise, why not think bigger. When you challenge yourself to think how a certain product, service and business can make it onto the "Today Show," you'd be amazed what ideas you can come up with.

Of course, this requires time and energy the typical tech PR pro doesn't have. But with most B2B marketing putting tech buyers to sleep, incorporating a consumer PR approach into the B2B mix can be what truly moves the needle.

*Alexis Blais is Vice President of Tech PR at ICR.* ●

## THE COVID NEWS CYCLE

— Continued from page 16

tomers stories, whether that be a business that has used tech to respond to the challenge of COVID, or an individual who has overcome adversity with the help of tech.

However, the old adage "if it bleeds, it leads" still holds true. We're all programmed to pay more attention to bad news, and I can't see that fundamentally changing anytime soon. So, framing good news as a response to a problem remains critical.

**Festa:** The US media is hungry for positive stories. The stories that illustrate how technology is solving a real-world problem, driving change for good, helping companies survive or thrive when faced with multiple challenges—that's what the media wants to write about.

Also, corporate social responsibility has become more important than ever. People

want to understand the role a company and its executives are playing in speaking up and out on topics that go far beyond their product or service to impact social, global, environmental and economic issues.

**What stance should brands be taking on COVID-19 and how to control the spread as attitudes become more polarized?**

**Thomas:** The first lockdown instilled a strong sense of community, unity and "Blitz spirit" across the UK. In the face of the unknown, almost everyone backed the Government measures and tolerated the restrictions on daily life, making it a no-brainer for brands to echo public sentiment in their communications.

However, opinion is now far more fractured, and brands should take stock of their stance. The proportion of Brits who say the Government is handling the crisis well dropped from 49 percent in March to just 32 percent in September, according to Ipsos MORI. As the second wave hits and job

support measures taper off, voices arguing for different approaches have become louder. Brands need to be listening and thinking carefully about where sentiment is at among their audiences, rather than rushing into a supportive position that may miss the mark.

**Festa:** What each company does in its own four "virtual" walls is more important than its external stance on COVID-19. Each company can play a critical role in protecting and supporting its own employees, and communication should start internally to ensure employees feel protected.

From there, companies can share best practices they've discovered during the pandemic: how they've kept morale up, ideal virtual environments for employees and rethinking current office spaces. Sharing best practices and providing education is where the focus should be.

*Darlene Doyle is Executive VP of Client Relations at PAN Communications.* ●

# Building technology thought leaders, a brand at a time

How technology brands can find and define their own compelling story.

By Amy Fisher

Innovation has been described as a business strategy, a brand value, even an organizational characteristic. It implies continuous ideation, creativity and execution based on an ability to understand and meet the needs of customers, employees, investors and other key stakeholders.

Innovation is what pushes ideas forward into the realm of reality.

While some may think that innovative technology brands and organizations are inherently “known,” most innovators actually start out in relative obscurity. Their groundbreaking ideas, inventions and offerings don’t happen overnight; it’s a long journey. Just ask Apple, Uber, Instacart or Stripe.

Conversely, some of the most innovative technology brands never break into the spotlight. So, what determines who skyrockets to fame and who fizzles?

Interestingly, one of the most critical aspects of being seen by others as an innovator is a brand’s ability to think and act like a leader. And as companies continue to face uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability for leaders to effectively transform and innovate is key.

## Finding a comfort zone

A lot of technology brands find being a thought leader extremely challenging. After all, you want your opinions to be seen and heard, but you don’t want to alienate any potential stakeholders. You want media to pay attention, but you don’t want to stick your neck out on controversial topics. This is even more top of mind as privacy, security and regulatory changes add complexity to technology development. Add looming anti-trust concerns to the mix and even small technology brands in crowded segments start to get a little nervous.

Here’s the thing: technology brands that put tight restrictions on their own thinking are approaching thought leadership in the wrong way. When you think about it, innovators already have all the qualities of a good thought leader. You just need to apply them to your brand communications. And while it’s important to understand the risks of stepping out on any thought leadership platform, the risks of staying silent and becoming invisible in your market can be even more damaging.

## What kind of thought leader are you?

If you’re a technology entrepreneur, you’re probably a “disruptor”: an upstart that’s challenging the way things are done

today. There’s no shortage of disruptive technologies impacting how we shop, travel and connect. AI, automation and machine learning are disrupting how we use data, and technologies like robotics are changing how we manufacture, invest, provide health care and more.

Having the confidence and means to create something new, and a desire to disrupt the status quo with something of greater value, are all essential for thought leadership. So, build on these qualities: be vocal about the challenges in your industry and be the one to step out with opinions on how you—and others—can solve them. This doesn’t mean that you or your technology brand have to be in a position to solve every problem. In fact, some may not be solvable. But, your leadership is equally valuable even when you point out the challenges and help start the discussion around why, how or when it might be solved. The visibility you create simply by becoming part of the conversation leads others to see you as a thought leader.

Not a young disruptive brand? That’s ok. The “sage”—typically a market leader or known, established brand—can also innovate. Think about large brands like Apple and 3M that constantly innovate and challenge products in specific categories. They’re both sages, but the iPhone and Post-It Notes are examples of disruptive products that created a whole new way to communicate and spawned entirely new product categories.

The sage’s tried-and-true reputation gives them more freedom to challenge the market and ask for support. Sages tend to lead the industry in new directions, convincing others to enthusiastically come along for the ride. It doesn’t always work; some innovators gain fast traction and then fizzle out over time when new technologies rise up and take over. Take, for example, the decline in Blu-Ray and DVD technology as streaming gained momentum. Brands like Netflix took up the position of thought leader and showed people the future.

Sages without thought leadership abilities or that stop innovating are followers; if stakeholders don’t understand your purpose and path, they won’t come along.

Finally, some technology brands are “conveners.” A convener steps forward to bring disparate groups together to solve a common problem. They actually thrive on it. Like sages, conveners need followers, but

the convener mindset is a perfect fit for effective thought leadership. If you’re a convener, you probably find it easy to take center stage, showing others the path forward and speaking on behalf of the group. Just remember to set aside your own brand’s story to focus on the group cause. Truly innovative thought leaders share the limelight and position themselves as a representative for the greater good, rather than the singular leader.

## Change your thinking to change your brand

Changing your mindset and how you think about thought leadership is the first step. It will give you the freedom to apply the skills you already use as a technology innovator to the process of building your brand. Your stakeholders will take notice and start to view you as an innovator.

Once you’ve identified your thought leadership role, you need a brand story, voice, messaging, visual identity and—most important—a strategic plan. Establishing a content and connectivity strategy is key to building and growing your reputation as a true thought leader.

If you’re a little intimidated by all this, don’t worry. Most technology brands don’t go through all these steps alone. Padilla’s role is to help innovators identify which type of thought leader you can be and align the innovative culture of your organization to a thought leadership program.

Our job is to help you define your own compelling story, identify the stakeholders most important to your success and make purposeful connections across your brand’s ecosystem.

Amy Fisher is a Vice President in Padilla’s Technology Practice. ○



Amy Fisher

## PR news brief

### Current Global hops on Subway

Current Global has scooped up AOR duties for the Subway sandwich shop chain.

The Interpublic unit will promote consumer PR initiatives and Subway’s reputation as a leader in the global QSR segment. Prior to Current Global, Ruder Finn had the business.

Michele DiNello, VP-Communications & PR at Subway, said the chain wanted a partner that aligns with its brand vision and can work as an extension of its internal PR team.

The firm has a team of about 20 staffers handling Subway, led by Lisa Dini, Executive VP, and Desta Roy, Senior VP on the consumer side, along with Renee Austin, Executive VP, Global Corporate Lead.



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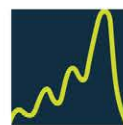
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# Four ways public relations can help fundraising

How a well-executed media relations campaign can increase the valuation of venture-capital backed tech startups.

By Edward M. Yang

**D**espite the uncertainty the pandemic has wreaked on the global economy, technological innovation marches on. It's true that during sizeable upheavals, there are always winners and losers. Certain industries have been devastated, such as airlines, hospitality, restaurants, gyms and a host of others. Other sectors have seen strong growth, such as software-as-a-service, anything cloud-enabled and other industries that encompass the work from home movement. As visionaries, venture capital firms are in a difficult position of trying to predict future trends and they're backing those bets with funding.

According to the PwC and CB Insights' Q2 2020 MoneyTree report, VC deals to U.S.-based companies saw a quarterly increase but were down 18 percent year over year. While significant, that means there's still money to be had and deals to be made. The recent successful IPOs of Snowflake and Asana show that the appetite from investors remains strong. As an agency, we've also been fortunate to work with startups in various stages of fundraising.

The most notable one is Beyond Limits, an artificial intelligence startup commercializing technology that was used by NASA and Caltech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. When they hired us three years ago, they'd just closed their Series B for \$20 million. Our mandate was to generate as much media coverage as possible to position them favorably for a Series C. Last month, the company announced a successful Series C for \$133 million.

Of course, it's not reasonable to expect that media coverage was the entire reason for the new round. But it's also similarly not reasonable to believe that the more than 150 media mentions we secured for them had no impact on their fundraising efforts. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in between.

The traditional reluctance of VC-backed startups to invest in PR is primarily due to the greater difficulty in proving ROI. It also doesn't help when high-profile investors such as Mark Cuban publicly declare that startups "should never hire a PR firm". However, the main reason Cuban gives—that PR isn't impossible for an entrepreneur to do themselves—is a bit weak. There

are many activities that aren't impossible for an entrepreneur to do themselves. That doesn't mean that logically they should do them. Time is one of a founder's most precious resources. Furthermore, most tech startup founders have technical backgrounds. They're engineers, coders and designers. They may not be the best in communicating or storytelling.

If a founder has the time, inclination and ability to do PR on their own, by all means they should. But there are countless other startups who could benefit from hiring an agency to run their media relations, while saving themselves the heartache of making common rookie mistakes.

There are many other founders who aren't sold on the value of PR as part of their marketing budget. But from our experience, the benefits of a well-thought out media relations campaign smartly integrated with other marketing activities can be a huge boon for future valuation.

Here are four ways how PR can help with fundraising:

**PR increases social proof.** There's a reason companies will post logos on their homepages. It could be logos of their current client roster. It could be logos of awards they've won. It could be logos of media outlets that they've been in. All of this provides the necessary social proof that says, yes, we are winners. Other forms of social proof include inclusion in various authoritative communities or databases such as Crunchbase and Wikipedia.

Crunchbase is the trusted data source for all things related to investment. Having a current company profile with a long list of media coverage looks professional and amplifies social proof. Wikipedia is the de facto encyclopedia of our age. Although it's an open source platform, don't even try creating a company profile with less than six quality media mentions. It will simply be flagged for deletion. Once deleted, it's very difficult to get a page back again. And no, press release wire service pickups don't count.

That leads to the second way: **VCs like to back winners.** It might sound obvious, but when you realize that 75 percent of venture-backed firms fail, it becomes all the more critical. VCs are relying on the one

or two homeruns to more than make up for the wide swath of startups who will fail. Being talked about regularly in the press gives the impression that a startup could be that winner that VCs desperately need.

Ample social proof from the first way ties directly into this. Nothing says potential winner more than an investor Googling a brand, and seeing a snippet from Wikipedia driving the Knowledge Graph, the info-box presented in the upper right.



Edward M. Yang

**PR also reduces perceived risk.** "No one ever got fired for buying IBM," is the traditional saying. Buyers and investors are risk-averse by their nature. Or a better way of saying it is they're looking to take calculated risk. The goal of a startup is to reduce how risky they look in the eyes of an investor. A startup creating the impression that they're the industry standard through consistent media coverage can help reduce their perceived riskiness.

Building a strong brand through an online presence with the aforementioned Google Knowledge Graph further reduces perceived risk.

Finally, **PR can also have a positive impact on other areas of marketing.** The traditional silos of marketing are rapidly coming down. Boundaries are blurring. Getting consistent press can be an accelerant for other marketing efforts such as SEO, inbound lead generation and grassroots viral marketing. Brand mentions and backlinks from earned media have a direct positive effect on SEO. Thought leadership articles can be an evergreen source of inbound leads for years to come. Earned media can be the perfect complement to the paid media campaigns many startups rely on.

Getting press isn't a magic bullet. But there's little doubt that the benefits of committing to public relations can be a huge help to startups who are fundraising.

Edward M. Yang is Managing Partner at Firecracker PR, an agency that gets technology brands known. ○





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# Eight markets weathering COVID and a weak economy

Despite a global pandemic and economic crisis, there were a number of technology sectors that actually saw increased investment in 2020.

By Jason Morris

I remember sitting in the lobby of my San Diego hotel watching the Obama-McCain debate in 2008. Lehman Brothers had already tanked, the financial crisis was in full swing and the question wasn't if the tech industry was going to be impacted by the financial crisis but by how much.

In the next two years, the tech industry would feel an impact like the broader economy but not to the extent of sectors like banking, real estate and automotive. Technology weathered better than most sectors due to increased investment into climate tech and healthcare technology boosted by the Obama-Biden stimulus bill, and the innovation of startup companies around mobile and cloud, driven by the smartphone revolution and the gig economy.

Fast forward 12 years and we're again facing an economic crisis amidst the backdrop of a global pandemic. Again, people in technology are wondering how the industry will fare against an economic crisis. Will it be among the hardest hit? Or will a few sectors help ride it out?

At Inkhouse, we've already seen evidence that some sectors in technology are weathering the storm better than the broader economy. From venture funding and S1-filings, to continued investment in PR and increased media coverage, several markets saw their 2020 stories rewritten overnight bringing new relevance, interest, and urgency to certain sectors.

Here are eight markets that saw their prospects and stories changed almost overnight in 2020:

## Digital healthcare + telehealth

Healthcare technology has come a long way since the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, but the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated just how much further it needs to go. From antiquated back-end health information, billing and payment infrastructure, to the lack of regulatory movement around telehealth, major investments need to be made by providers, payors and other parts of the value chain to make digital healthcare a reality.

## Cloud + digital transformation

The long tail of digital transformation—small and mid-sized businesses, and some traditional industries—were exposed in 2020 as lacking the ability to operate their businesses digitally and service a customer who might not be able to set foot in a physical environment. Cloud infrastructure companies are seeing an increase in de-

mand as these businesses seek to accelerate their paths to being digital-first.

## Remote work + HR tech

It's been a while since virtual desktop infrastructure and remote work technologies like video conferencing and collaboration got the attention they have in 2020 and for good reason—COVID has forced many to work from home and many more are predicting it's a change that could stick post-vaccine. And as more companies go remote, HR and operations teams are dealing with the new reality of recruiting, onboarding, and managing a completely virtual and, hopefully, more diverse workforce leading to new investments in software tools that help them do so more effectively.

## Proptech + smart home

The new "work from anywhere" mindset has consumers investing in bandwidth, home office and smart technologies as they look to make their remote work situations productive and tenable, and their homes a more comfortable place to be almost full time. It's also accelerated the on-demand economy forcing multifamily and single-family home developers to not only change the way they show properties but also give access to package, food and grocery delivery services. Communities and homes are about to get a lot smarter.

## Edtech

Parents, teachers and school districts are struggling with the new reality of remote or hybrid learning situations, leading to new investments in remote learning and teaching technologies, as well as replacements to in-person instruction and tutoring. Parents are investing in new laptops, learning software and e-learning services to make sure their students don't fall behind.

## Climate tech

The cut in pollution has shown people globally what happens when you take millions of cars off of the road and cut fossil fuel consumption overnight. Wildfires, hurricanes, rotating blackouts and agricultural and food supply chain disruptions are also going to spark a new wave of climate tech innovations and investments not seen since the stimulus package in 2009. The renewable energy, electrified mobility, agtech and energy infrastructure sectors are among the most talked-about categories.

## Biotech

COVID-19 has shined a spotlight on drug and vaccine discovery and development in a way not seen since the hunt for an HIV

vaccine. Debates over the reuse of existing drugs and treatments and the importance of clinical trials for a vaccine has probably made the average person more fluent in drug development than they have ever been. This has led to a lot of air time for the custom-built technologies being used in the race to find treatments for COVID, including machine learning and big data analytics.



Jason Morris

## Early-stage venture investing

What do Instagram, Airbnb, Okta, Hulu, Zynga, Nutanix, Waze, WhatsApp, Uber, Venmo, Pinterest, Square, Cloudera and dozens of other iconic—or since acquired—tech companies have in common? They were all founded just before or in the throes of the financial crisis. We've seen many big and small venture firms close new funds in 2020 and the small bets they place in 2020 and 2021 could be the iconic companies we all know in five to 10 years. Necessity is the mother of invention, and downturns tend to create a lot of necessity.

There are no silver linings to COVID-19, only things we can learn from and use to help people and recover faster. Here's hoping that the aforementioned markets can teach us a lot about how to address real market needs and tell stories of hope that inspire.

Jason Morris, President of Inkhouse, leads growth for Inkhouse from the firm's office in San Francisco. ●

## PR news brief

### W2O acquires Starpower

W2O has acquired entertainment and influencer marketing agency Starpower.

Starpower creates partnerships backed by data-driven social strategies for brands across health and wellness, consumer, lifestyle, entertainment and sport. It has worked with talent such as Serena Williams and Howie Mandel, along with networks of micro-influencers for targeted social campaigns.

The Starpower team will operate under W2O's single, integrated profit-and-loss operation. Matthew Lalin and Jared Weiss, who founded Starpower in 2007, will continue to lead the agency.

"We've partnered with W2O since Starpower's inception and have always shared similar philosophies about maintaining an entrepreneurial spirit, the power of data, and a passion for powerful human storytelling," said Lalin. "Given the extraordinary growth in branded entertainment and influencer marketing, it's a natural time for us to join forces."





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*-Alex Lam, Vice President & Head of the  
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# The next best thing is being better together

How technology leaders can join forces to move society forward and support the greater good during the COVID-19 crisis.

By Heather Kernahan

Amidst the challenges 2020 has wrought, I've been able to find hope in an unexpected colloquialism to remain grounded and focused. It isn't advice or reassurance from a great leader in our industry or someone that has persevered through previous trials and tribulations. It isn't an inspirational saying offering specific guidance or direction, but a persistent reminder that we are wired to constantly innovate—to push our tools, platforms and resources to better ourselves and our experiences.

To be specific, I'm talking about bread.

I'm referring to the bread-slicing machine deemed groundbreaking enough to make front-page news in 1928, automating the bread-making process and introducing the phrase, "the best thing since sliced bread" as a benchmark for technological progress and modernization. Nearly 100 years later, the "one-upsmanship" of this phrase still lights a competitive fire, as brands position their newest innovations as "the best" on the market. From the floppy disk to external hard drives to USB keys to the cloud, we're conditioned to not look back, and brands remain steadfast in fueling our anticipation for what's now, new and next.

Which brings me back to bread. It isn't so much the physical act of slicing bread, but what the technology enabled. The United States was knee deep in the Great Depression. It was a time where many had to band together, get scrappy and creative to solve human needs and survive. Outside of the actual task, the bread slicer, in its part, made lives easier, served as a catalyst for other inventions and propelled society forward.

Considering COVID-19, we now have the same call-to-action. And luckily, we've seen the technology industry step up and go beyond being the "next-best-latest-greatest" and in turn focus on the greater good, but there's still a lot to learn as we enter this latest age of "coopetition" and businesses aim to carefully balance authenticity, bottom lines and real change.

## Technologists are problem solvers at heart

Despite everything that's occurred, we continue to be brought together by the humble truth that technology is solution oriented. Whether that means simplifying the sandwich-making process or using data and resources to combat a global pan-

demic, technology's goal is to improve and progress us one step further than we were previously. Regardless of industry, no brand is immune from this notion, with mission statements, slogans and boilerplates pointing to a larger purpose in just a few words or sentences.

"Think Different," "Just Do It" and "Imagination at Work" are just a few consistent reminders that humans power technology, bringing with them the compassion, understanding and context necessary to create meaningful solutions. This emphasis on humanity is coming to the forefront as many companies set aside creative differences, competitive data sets and market share to be better and stronger together, getting back to the root of their true mission.

For example, we saw early on two typical rivals join forces and align their missions to support society's greater good in tracing the spread of COVID-19. Apple and Google partnering doesn't mean seceding power or positioning one company over another, but both recognizing that measurable business results can still be gained while serving a higher purpose.

## Our culture, for culture

This is where we come in as communications practitioners. We know that right now, even businesses that have always been or are newly appointed as essential, are re-strategizing. We've seen industries and organizations struggling to stay afloat juxtaposed against businesses booming with new or increased demand. We've also seen businesses go to market differently, embracing coopetition, recognizing how their tools, data and services can be leveraged to address the COVID-19 crisis.

In March, as we officially listed Zoom alongside toilet paper as vital and essential, we also shifted gears as our clients tossed pre-approved FY20 plans aside and pivoted in real-time as the pandemic dominated the news cycle. Regardless of the current state of their business, they were all eager to communicate something in order to remain, raise or prove relevancy—or show they are in a position to help—amidst all the noise.

In an already fast-paced industry, we moved even faster—recognizing the larger role marketing and communications can play in aiding business objectives. Specifically, at Hotwire, we doubled down on our investment in digital marketing and

strategy—knowing that as budgets are being scrutinized, we still need to deliver on customer engagement and message pull-through.

As storytellers at heart, we are meeting the demand to come across as authentic and genuine and not opportunistic. We're re-shaping how our clients present themselves, omitting aggressive positioning and the narrow-minded "best thing since" approach to instead focus on what is best for humanity and society. It's encouraging and inspiring to see, and a monumental time to see the sheer power and potential of technology. Or in other words, the best thing since sliced bread.

Heather Kernahan is CEO, North America at Hotwire. **O**



Heather Kernahan

## Media news brief

### Social responsibility to shape social media in 2021

Socially conscious audiences and the impact they have on brands, politics and society as a whole is expected to account for the single greatest impact to social media next year, according to a recent survey by social media analysis firm Talkwalker and software company Hubspot.

The survey, which asked 50 industry experts, social media gurus and PR professionals from around the world to identify the coming year's top social media trends, cited the impact of socially conscious audiences as the number-one trend affecting brands in 2021, underscoring the need for companies to engage with consumers on topics such as mental health, inclusivity and social justice least they face becoming irrelevant.

"Politics, equality, education, mental health, finance, changing food trends are proliferant conversations on social media," the report read. "These topics are critical to these generations, and social media is their way to bring them to attention. The COVID-19 health crisis also impacted Gen Z badly—50% have either lost a job, or had someone in their household lose a job because of the pandemic. In the coming years, they will have more to fight for, and will potentially become more vocal about the issues that matter more to them."

Other trends experts said will define 2021 include a return of "old-school" marketing, an increase of social gaming, a continuing rise of digital disinformation, nostalgia marketing, conversational (IA) marketing, meme-driven media and "remixing," or the art of recreating content via apps like TikTok, Koji, and Instagram Reels.





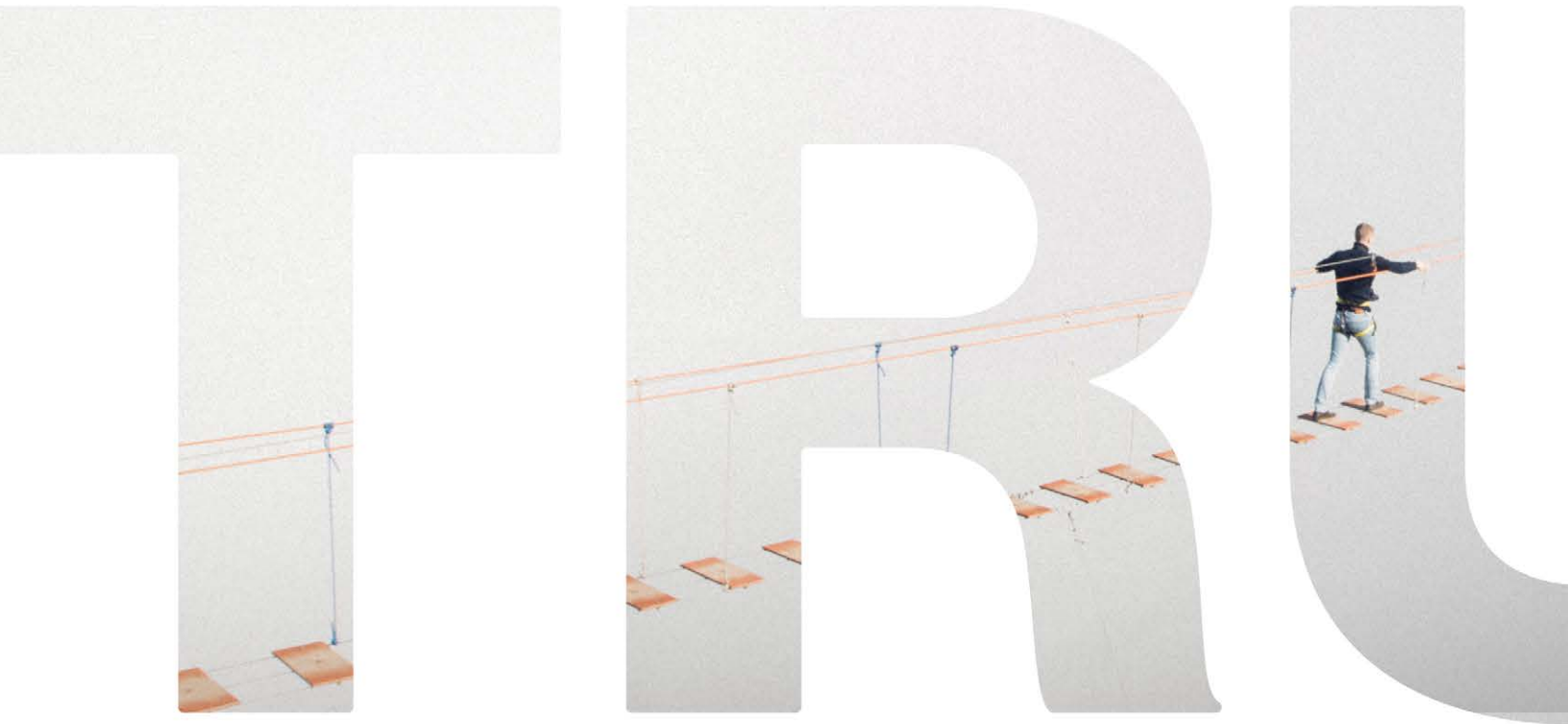
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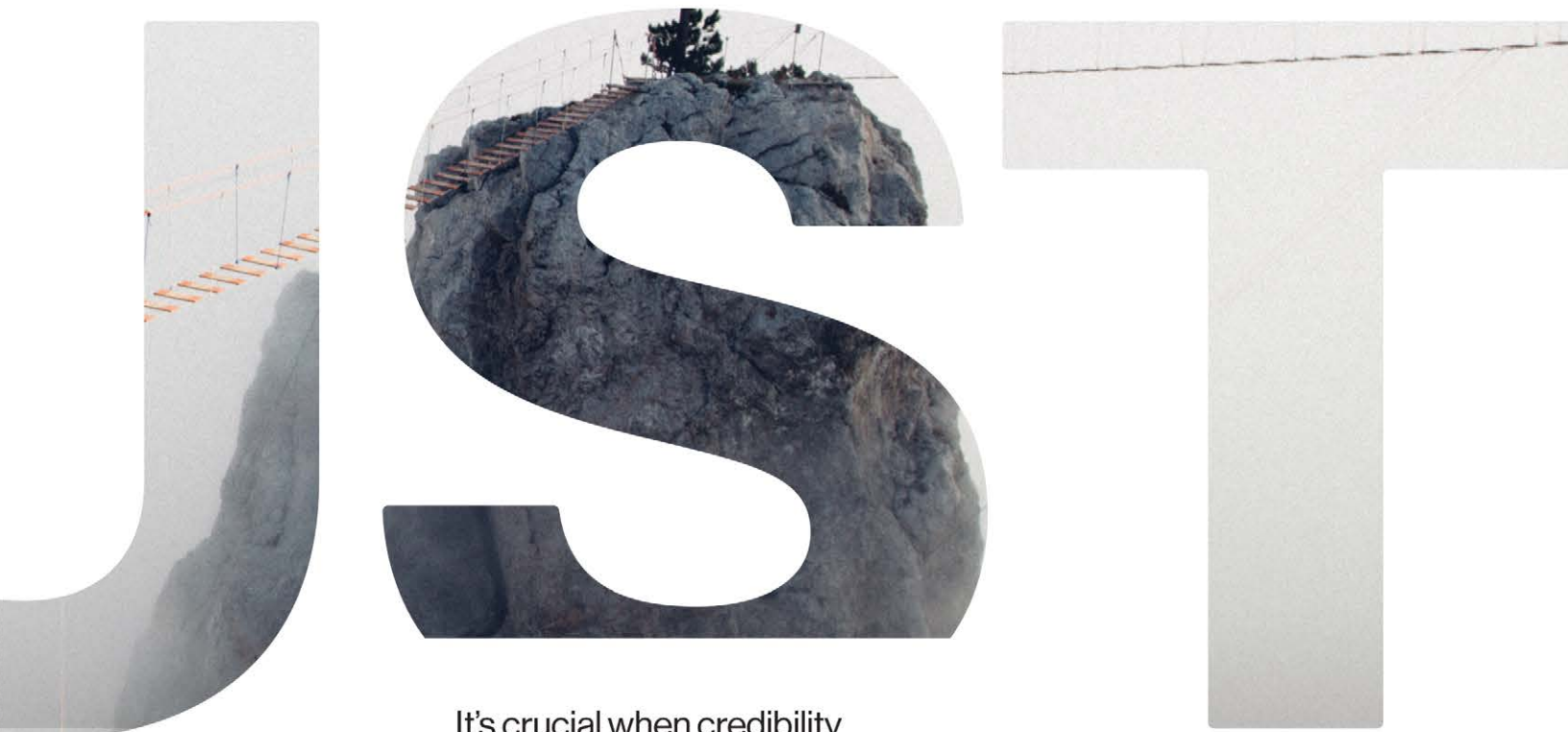
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# TechLab: a tech-first vision for communications

With the pandemic driving an exponential growth in technology adoption, companies need to stay on top of what's next in an ever-changing tech reset. Ruder Finn developed the TechLab to help companies identify and pilot new technologies for smarter engagement.

By Tejas Totade

In 2001, Watts S. Humphrey, often referred to as the “Father of Software Quality,” came up with a quote that would go viral in corporate America nearly two decades after he first said it: “Every business is a software business.”

By now, most professionals—technologists or not—have heard the related quote, “every company is a tech company.” While it’s a profound soundbite in itself, being technology-first alone isn’t enough to achieve success. According to the market intelligence firm CB Insights, 42 percent of startups fail not because they ran out of cash but because they offered products or services that the market didn’t need. This means the “if you build it, they will come” ideology can at times be a major fallacy. The fear of failure should never stymie technological innovation but innovation for the sake of it doesn’t always equate to success. A technology-first problem-solving approach is the need of the hour. And it’s the fundamental premise and guiding principle behind Ruder Finn’s TechLab initiative.

## Technology for co-creation

Founded in 2019, TechLab is Ruder Finn’s very own tech radar that keeps a pulse on the transformative world of tech startups and technology trends to identify those that offer cutting-edge solutions to deliver a superior value for its clients.

Over the past 12 months, the RF TechLab has discovered and explored pilot programs with entry and intermediate-level tech startups in the disciplines of Natural Language Processing, Voice User Interface, Conversational AI, Robotics, Deterministic Targeting, Social Analytics and Amplification, Real-time Market Research and Dynamic Video, to name a few. The ones that make the cut and are aligned with a business case are then embedded into the relevant client offerings to build better solutions.

The response from the clients has been overwhelmingly positive as the initiative focuses on being strategy-driven as opposed to merely being tool-based which means they see TechLab and Ruder Finn as a collaborator, a co-creator and a partner. TechLab has been able to deliver a direct and immediate impact in generating positive outcomes for Ruder Finn’s clients by piloting offerings, many of which are digital firsts for those respective organizations. Leveraging AI to shape and drive smarter

engagement strategies, virtual assistants to enable real-time connections with customers and niche audiences, personalizing the virtual experience to drive a sense of community and belonging are just some of the notable successes of TechLab in the past year. More are in the works!

## Audience engagement and connected healthcare

2020 has been a year of unprecedented change with the “new normal” being thrust upon everyone. And while not many will remember the year with great fondness, it has been a year that has seen the most rapid adoption of technologies in recent times. The American Society of Clinical Oncology went completely virtual for its annual three-day scientific meeting and still received record-breaking attendance with more than 42,700 attendees from 138 countries. The social distancing hasn’t reduced the interest in professionals to continue learning about their industry and their field of study. However, assuming you’re not ASCO, when every meeting on your prospective attendee’s calendar is a virtual meeting, how do you ensure yours receives attendance?

Within a couple of months, early in the pandemic, Zoom fatigue truly set in and that led to TechLab focusing on audience engagement as opposed to simply attendance. TechLab identified platforms offering real-time audience interaction and engagement for virtual meetings and conferences and used many of these in Ruder Finn’s own weekly townhalls. The democratization of interaction was seen as a breath of fresh air as it catalyzed inclusion, especially of those attendees who would otherwise be bashful of expressing themselves during a 100-person Zoom call!

The pandemic has accelerated the need to seek tech-based approaches to solve everyday problems, and led to mainstream uptake of technologies that were otherwise considered niche or limited to tech hobbyists. Telehealth has been around for years but was never seriously considered by patients or even healthcare providers for that matter until COVID-19 hit. According to the “COVID-19 Consumer Survey” conducted by McKinsey in May, 76 percent of survey respondents indicated they were likely to use telehealth going forward, up from just 11 percent in 2019. More importantly, 74 percent of the telehealth us-

ers reported high satisfaction. Chatbots and conversational AI technologies have also been around but suffered the infamy of being perceived as gimmicky or worse, frustrating. However, as the pandemic surged across the world and put a serious strain on healthcare resources, organizations like the CDC in partnership with Microsoft and WHO in collaboration with Sprinklr launched chatbots of their own to reduce the bottlenecks in information dispersal and counter COVID-19 misinformation respectively. This pivot in the use of chatbots from a nice-to-have tool to a crisis communication lifeline has made organizations and users realize their true potential. At TechLab we see this as an endorsement of our vision as we identified the potential of conversational AI from very early on. Ruder Finn through TechLab has delivered innovative solutions using this technology and has also led to us being listed in the Amazon list of preferred agencies for conversational AI application development. Our latest and ongoing client work in the space includes the development of virtual assistants designed to help patients and their caregivers better navigate their disease states, from getting diagnosis, to identifying treatment journeys with the goal of reducing a patient’s diagnosis odyssey from months, at times, to days or weeks at most.

## 2021 and beyond

While we certainly hope 2021 will be a much better year, public health-wise, the lessons learned and habits formed during the pandemic months will become muscle memory and remain as the preferred form of communication for many even post the pandemic. As entire sectors prepare for what 2021 could be like in terms of customer experience, it’s important to build on the tech-driven mantras of success from this year. Early identification of technological trends that meet business objectives is well poised to drive success as the adoption of emerging technologies will continue to increase. TechLab will be there to ensure the new normal is the better normal!

Tejas Totade is Ruder Finn’s Head of Emerging Technology. ○



Tejas Totade



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# Why data-driven storytelling is PR's secret sauce

Understanding what audiences need is a critical skill in telling a compelling story.

By Brian Sinderson

**A**t the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicting information about masks and social distancing caused widespread chaos and confusion. But once medical and science professionals reached a consensus by analyzing data, we adjusted to a new reality.

Analyzing data to inform insights is a crucial skill, especially for tech marketers, and it's a key learning to take away from our current pandemic challenges. Communicators who stay focused on telling a good story by leveraging data-driven tools will continue to create accurate and compelling content, even in uncertain times.

Those of us in tech PR like to think that everyone has the same comprehensive knowledge of the sector as we do. But the reality is that most people don't because jargon and policy get in the way. When we make our clients sound like know-it-alls, readers stop paying attention.

We can bring them back, however, by showing how technology impacts their everyday lives. If we know the audiences we want to reach before we start writing, we can tailor content to fit their needs.

Of course, we can't do this alone. We need to work with our clients to make our work more approachable and straightforward. That means we need to understand what audiences need and develop compelling stories that convey a distinct perspective to capture their attention.

Humans have cherished stories since they drew them on cave walls, and while the

medium may have changed, the message remains the same. Creative content rules if facts and data-driven insights back it.

Because of this, it's important to gather accurate information as part of the storytelling process. Data and insights are part of the secret sauce that ties everything together. Tech marketers who combine good storytelling with credible statistics will help their clients secure a much-needed advantage in today's competitive world.

Information can be a powerful tool to make impactful change, and the good news is there is more of it available than ever before. But tech PR professionals also need to know how to use it. By selecting the right data points and combining them with a compelling story, they can help their clients address their customers' needs.

## A powerful toolbox

The importance of data-driven storytelling needs to be part of every organization's culture. That means training teams to find meaningful information, so they can craft compelling messages that inspire action.

We first need to understand what questions audiences are asking, so our stories can address those needs. We should use analytics tools to determine what problems or keywords users search for online around a given topic. We can then verify that our content addresses those queries and offer solutions that make it easy for audiences to act.

We also need to understand any data that our clients have to support a given topic, as

well as any primary research they've fielded that can add credibility. For example, companies that provide cybersecurity solutions often track attacks made against I.T. network infrastructures. They also often survey I.T. decision-makers about the issues that keep them up at night. These insights can help make content more relatable and reinforce storylines.

Through news and social listening tools, tech PR pros can see which sites are most popular among the audience they want to reach. They can then get insight into the topics that readers are interested in or follow on social media. By helping their clients aim relevant content at these specific groups, PR teams can ensure they target the right people at the right time.

For trending news, it's crucial to use specific hashtags for cross-platform campaigns. Through access to social listening tools that harness information about diverse topics, account teams can target the right influencers with very broad or extremely targeted outreach as appropriate.

There are also plenty of evergreen issues that have a longer trajectory. Industry leaders should search these topics frequently to determine engagement and strike when the iron is hot. Jumping on a story early and sending a well-researched proactive pitch at just the right time will ensure your clients are in a reporter's head when they need that expertise.

These tools are not just relevant to tech clients. Agencies can use insights and strategies in many sectors to address relevant issues or create specific points of view tied to breaking news or industry issues. That way, they will have this valuable information at their disposal whenever they need it.

Tech PR pros who know how to find and use data-driven information can better craft impactful stories that generate interest and ultimately translate to more sales opportunities. By selecting the right data points and combining them with a compelling narrative, they can solve clients' problems and make any subject more exciting or relevant. When done well, this is a winning strategy that will continue to pay dividends for clients.

*Brian Sinderson is Senior Partner and East Coast Tech Practice Lead at Finn Partners.* ○



Brian Sinderson

## Social media managers on the move

**F**ew social media managers plan to stay in their present positions for more than a couple of years, according to a study.

"The Career Path of a Social Media Professional," conducted by the Institute for Public Relations Digital Media Research Center, Ragan Communications and the University of Florida, surveyed more than 400 social media managers to find out about their job roles and responsibilities, career ambitions, and the reporting and management structure at their companies.

Only 13 percent of those surveyed said they would "definitely" be promoted to a more senior social media position, with 27 saying they would "probably" be promoted. On the other side a third (33 percent) said they would "probably not" or "definitely not" be promoted.

By Steve Barnes

Perhaps because of that, few respondents plan to stick around in their position for the long haul. Almost a quarter (22 percent) said they were actively seeking new opportunities. Only 19 percent said they planned to be in their current role in five years' time.

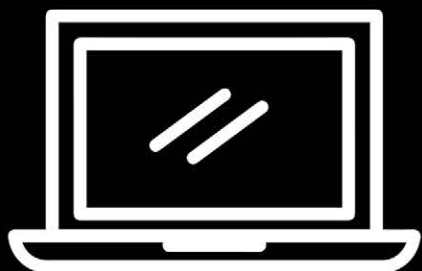
Close to a third (31 percent) of those surveyed said they were the only employee on their company's social media team, while 51 percent said they led a team of two or three people, and only six percent were on social media team with more than 11 employees.

Half of respondents said their social media team was part of the larger communications/PR functions, while 38 percent were part of their company marketing department, and just four percent were part of a standalone social media department. ○





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# Understanding election emotions through AI

The November presidential election could set into motion a period of uncertainty, social unrest and panic, which includes disruption in many workplaces. Here are a few steps business leaders can take to avoid an employee election meltdown.

By Ann Barlow

**T**he thing that makes us special, makes us human, is our capacity to feel. Our emotions are our superpower, and yet we spend a lot of time and energy trying to bury, ignore, pretend that they don't exist.

Four years ago, workplaces were disrupted following the surprising outcome of the presidential election. In 2020, emotions and discourse are running significantly hotter as millions believing nothing less than the future of the country and safety of its people are at stake.

Using our propriety Mindset.AI solution, Peppercomm identified, tracked and predicted how the candidates' supporters will react to the election. Fueled by AI and designed specifically to derive crisis-focused emotional states, Mindset.AI analyzes millions of conversations drawn from thousands of varied sources to identify the presidential candidates' supporters in both 2016 and 2020.

## The emotional tide is high

The 2016 election sparked disruption in many workplaces, and 2020 is on track to produce even more. To fully comprehend the impact that general elections can have on voters, Peppercomm analyzed two data sets: The 2016 general election that saw Donald Trump lose to Hillary Clinton in the popular vote but win the election in the Electoral College; and the 2020 presidential campaign from its beginning through late October.

Both presidential campaigns show clear, intense emotional effects on the candidates' supporters. The effects are so dramatic that the 2020 and 2016 elections can rightfully be considered national crises due to the nature of the emotional toll exacted on Americans.

## Data suggests 2020 could be worse

Not only have supporters of both Biden and Trump shown an increasing level of fear in recent days, looking at the data over the entire years proves all other negative emotions have risen relentlessly during the latter half of 2020.

October has proven to be a difficult month for supporters of both candidates. The fact that negative emotions have jumped indicates that the situation is only getting worse. Trump supporters are seeing a sharp spike in fear with continued uncer-

tainty over the President's health and his re-election prospects.

Biden supporters saw a jump in joy with Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis. This joy quickly disappeared but rose again with Biden's sustained strong polling. However, confusion over Trump's public statements of good health and fears over possible election violence have superseded any positive sentiment.

## What leaders need to consider

What the Mindset.AI election research shows us unequivocally is that nearly all your employees will experience strong emotions during this coming election cycle. It's a wave that's coming, and your options don't include stopping it, or burying it or leaving it at the door of your organization. Instead, as a leader you can help steer your employees and your organization safely to the other side.

## Steps to avoid an employee meltdown

The following are derived from Peppercomm's Election, Employees and Productivity Playbook which offers communication strategies for productivity and wellbeing.

**Plan for election day and, more importantly, beyond.** Even if by Wednesday all indications point to a victor, employees may still feel anxious—regardless of political preference—about the possibility of court challenges or other interventions. Based on your intel gathering, now is the time to be ready. Will employees want to take time to join in protests? Will they pressure leadership to take a stand? What's possible and how will you anticipate and respond?

**Time for leaders to lead.** Even for apolitical cultures and individuals, a protracted decision will be frustrating and stressful. Leaders need to remind people about the importance of adhering to ground rules. Be sure leaders connect through town halls and team meetings just as they have with the pandemic. No fancy production: just a few talking points, decent lighting and a camera at eye level.

**Watch for middle-management meltdown.** Even the most unshakable manager could be nearing the end of their rope by now. They may be tired of distracted employees and of reinforcing and model-

ing the behaviors and be feeling their own sense of frustration and anxiety. For these managers, extra support and guidance are essential if they are to remain resilient and motivate their teams.

## If you want employees to work, give them ways to deal.

Given the importance Americans are placing on this election employers are bound to see emotions running high and, whether we like it or not, employees may feel frozen, hopeful, anxious or depressed. In addition to acknowledging these feelings and reminding employees about the importance of maintaining mutual respect, encourage employees to use the resources available to them.

**Practical steps toward productivity.** As you make space for employees to deal with their reactions, it's reasonable to remind employees that everyone has a job to do for the health and wellbeing of the business and its employees. Ask employees to commit to do at least one important thing the first day postelection.

If they're too distracted to take on more prioritized work, then encourage them to tackle the other things that require less focus. And so on ...

As employers, we can be forgiven for wanting to avoid yet another disruption to 2020. But one thing the tumult has shown is that companies ignore employees' emotions at their own risk. The source of success for most remains the people who move the business forward, so even when financial pressure drives the average leader to want to focus more on spreadsheets than on soft skills, we're learning that wellbeing is a critical success factor.

By acknowledging this and taking steps to shore up employees through the election process, companies stand a better chance of having employees that are healthier, more focused, more dedicated and, ultimately, stronger contributors to the organization's success.

*Ann Barlow is Senior Partner and Head of Employee Engagement at Peppercomm. ●*



Ann Barlow





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# Where's your USP?

Why your unique selling proposition should be the crown jewel of all your PR and marketing campaigns.

By Dan Garza

**U**SP stands for unique selling proposition. It means your product or service has a certain feature that your competitors don't have. Crafted into a short, declarative sentence, your USP should stand out in each and every PR and content marketing project you have going.

Silicon Valley is waking up to the fact that marketing today focuses on PR and content marketing. Conventional sales calls are so yesterday in today's fast paced technology marketing and sales; customers buying all sorts of electronics chips, software, network systems, medical electronics and even products built on tomorrow's technologies don't answer phones unless it's their bosses.

So, there we are. What customers do instead is check out Google and other search engines; they go online to read pertinent articles to get educated on certain technical issues or learn from technology tutorials in those publications. Or, they hear industry leaders talk about technology issues at major conferences. Once customers have a good foundation about a company, its technologies and its products, they're ready to undertake the next level in the sales funnel, the possible buy.

Let's back up a bit. So, what they read in those publications or hear at those conferences, did it actually sink into customers' minds? Were they able to distinguish or differentiate one competitor's product from another's? Silicon Valley offers a vast array of technology products from a variety of vendors. For most customers, they all appear to look alike with similar features and functions. How is the customer to determine what's best for his or her application?

## Come on in USP

This is where the USP comes in, figuratively speaking. Let's say it's standing at the door waiting for you to let it in. In many cases, here's what's happening. Yes, some Silicon Valley companies are embracing content marketing in their PR activities. Yet, there are issues that need to be overcome to let USP in.

Here are a couple of them: confusing advertising copy writing with content marketing writing; and a disjointed, unorganized, non-strategic content marketing program with or without a USP.

For starters, some marketers think of content marketing writing as advertising copywriting. It's highly promotional tinged with hyperbole and superlatives and the text flaunts product features as the best in the industry. So, how can you get your USP in

advertising copy and still be credible?

Content marketing writing, meanwhile, follows the tenets of AP style newspaper writing: short active voice sentences, straight facts, zeros in on a customer's technology issues and offers a helping hand with educational and tutorial content. A USP in content marketing is considerably more credible since in all cases it can be embedded in contributed byline articles that get a tacit editorial endorsement.

Number-two issue is trying to effectively embed a USP in unorganized, non-strategic marketing content. It's virtually impossible. A tech company may have settled on a USP. However, it's not being applied properly because people from all sectors of the company are writing content and throwing it at the webmaster to post on the website or getting it to customers as eBooks or white papers. In virtually every case, the USP is completely absent since most of these individuals don't know a thing about a USP.

In a similar scenario, a company hasn't developed its USP. Again, a number of people in a company are chipping in their own versions of marketing content. Those different versions come from various marketing groups, outside PR agencies, social media marketing, web marketers and even from execs. One tech company marketing exec put it best by saying, "It's creating content for the sake of creating content, and it's highly annoying."

## Content differentiated with USP

So, how do you turn this ship around and head it toward creating and sustaining an effective USP in your PR content marketing writing? You do it slowly and methodically. You don't want to abruptly stop all that incoming non-USP content by pontificating your case. All that does is alienate the content contributors.

Leave the status quo alone and slowly start making incremental and positive steps to institute USP and an overall strategic program. Eventually, your marketing colleagues will get it and join in with you.

First off, nail down that USP. That's done by taking the initiative with a trusted team of marketing and sales leaders in the company. Collaborate, talk about the key product or service differentiators and then by process of elimination zero in on the one key feature or item that no other competitor has. Write that differentiator on the board. Then write out the USP in a short declarative sentence. For example, "XYZ feature performs this function that pro-

vides customers blank benefits."

From this point on, your new USP is the key factor differentiating not only your product, but all your marketing content because you want to embed it in each and every piece of marketing content: byline articles, blogs, web content, white papers, etc.

When content writers from other parts of the company come to you with their great works, spend time educating them and politely send them back with clear instructions to factor in the USP that your marketing organization has adopted.

Once you have a consensus on the USP, plan out your content marketing topics with each topic having the USP embedded in it and obliquely written into the text so it's not so obvious. Then, start the subject matter expert interviewing to get the necessary content, which will serve as the foundation for your content marketing campaign.

A contributed byline article campaign is the best USP and content marketing driver. For starters, each article is a piece of the proverbial "good press." It's good press because it's expertly written to comply with editorial requirements, but also to convey your company's product and technology messages in several ways, but not blatantly.

Crafted properly, a contributed article hands you the flexibility and freedom to cleverly embed your USP. In many cases, you can frame the USP so it appears several times in an article you ghostwrite.

For instance, it can be in the lead paragraph by creating an issue the reader is confronting, and your USP is written as a way to resolve that issue. Further into the body of the article, you can once again plug in your USP by wording it a certain way to describe a possible solution. And thirdly, once you've detailed the issue well into the text—say 400 to 500 words—then it's time to punch in the USP once again written very differently from the earlier times.

As we've said here, when the right USP is absent, your PR story lacks the linchpin for differentiating the essence of your product and technology from competitors. Therefore, it's best to huddle with marketing, sales and your execs to skillfully produce that USP and embed it into all your contributed articles, press releases and other PR assets.

Dan Garza is a marketing PR professional and veteran observer of Silicon Valley PR. **○**



Dan Garza



# Fake news will wage on despite who wins election

While most journalists agree that the “fake news” era has dealt a major blow to the news industry, few believe the outcome of the presidential election will affect the problem in any meaningful way.

By Jon Gingerich

A polarized media environment, a digital news ecosystem rife with misinformation and a President who continually slanders the press has eroded journalists’ credibility as well as Americans’ trust in the news industry.

But don’t expect our “fake news” problem to get any better after the election, according to a recent report released by Chicago-based B2B communications agency Greentarget.

Greentarget’s report surveyed journalists to analyze their sentiments surrounding the fake news phenomenon as well as what effects it’s had on their profession. It found that while a quarter of the journo surveyed (25 percent) said they believe Trump has had an extremely negative impact on journalists’ credibility, less than half (46 percent) expressed optimism that the prospect of a new administration would improve the situation. Nearly the same number (43 percent) admitted a different

president would make them feel no more or less optimistic about the future of their profession.

In fact, only a third (34 percent) said they think the fake news problem started under Donald Trump’s watch (most think it began before he was sworn in as President), even if a majority agree that the phenomenon has gotten worse in the last four years.

An overwhelming majority of respondents believe the fake news phenomenon has affected the news industry for the worse: 80 percent of journalists “strongly” believe fake news has negatively impacted their profession, while 14 percent said they believed that it has at least somewhat affected it. (Only three percent were neutral and an additional three percent disagreed about fake news’ negative impact.)

More than half of journalists (56 percent) additionally said they believe social media platforms such as Facebook are the single greatest enablers of fake news content.

Despite their pessimism, reporters believe the burden falls on fellow journalists (23 percent), editors (22 percent) or news councils and journalism organizations (19 percent) to call out fake news and identify misleading information. Only 12 percent think the government should take the reins in the fight against fake news.

Similarly, while more than a third of journalists polled (39 percent) said they support using the law to curb fake news, almost as many (35 percent) said they don’t support such anti-fake news laws. About a quarter of respondents (26 percent) said they remain indifferent on the matter.

Greentarget’s report, “Fake News 2020: Combatting Misinformation & Disinformation In a Polarized World,” surveyed more than 100 working journalists online between July and September. Half the journalists surveyed have worked in the profession for more than 20 years. ○

## Direct-to-consumer brands on the rise

According to a recent study, direct-to-market brands are expected to comprise an even larger share of consumers’ overall purchases in the coming years, especially in the clothing/apparel, health, wellness and beauty sectors.

By Steve Barnes

Direct-to-market brands are already big, and over the next five years they are likely to get even bigger, adding another headache for traditional retailers slammed by COVID-19 and the dominant presence of online shopping, according to a new study from Diffusion.

Conducted in partnership with research firm YouGov, Diffusion’s 2021 DTC Purchase Intent Index found that more than two out of five respondents were familiar with a DTC brand, and 69 percent of those who knew about DTC brands had made at least one DTC purchase in the past year.

While only four percent said that they made 80 to 100 percent of their purchases from DTC brands, 45 percent said they bought from DTC brands 20 percent or more of the time.

According to the survey, those numbers are heading up. In the coming year, 79 percent of respondents familiar with DTC brands plan to increase the number

of purchases they make, with six percent intending to make 80 to 100 percent of their purchases from DTC brands and 52 percent saying they will turn to DTC for 20 percent or more of their purchasing.

The most popular items for DTC shopping are clothing and apparel, and health, wellness and beauty, with 29 percent saying that had made purchases from at least one of those. Food (18 percent), everyday goods (18 percent) and tech and gadgets (17 percent) also showed considerable strength.

When it comes to the reasons why consumers opt for DTC brands, more than four in ten (44 percent) say that they perceive those brands as being produced at higher quality and lower cost, with 38 percent liking the idea that DTC brands are primarily e-commerce driven.

But retail is not totally out of the running. Over a third of those familiar with DTC brands (36 percent) say that conve-

nience and being to have the product the same day would sway them toward traditional retail. Almost as many (35 percent) said that fast, free shipping could move the needle toward retail, and 32 percent said that they liked staying with a retail brand they already trust.

In addition, DTC is seen as having its own drawbacks. 35 percent said that not being able to physically examine items was a downside, 27 percent wanted to avoid the hassle of returning a product via shipping and 21 percent fear that they are buying into a social media or Instagram scam.

DTC brands also received points if they exhibited social responsibility, with 31 percent of respondents saying they would purchase from brands that have demonstrated support for social and environmental issues, and 15 percent giving high marks to sustainable brands.

The Diffusion/YouGov survey was conducted in late September. ○

# O'Dwyer's guide to TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATIONS



**ARPR's Anna Ruth Williams, CEO; Blair Broussard, Chief People & Operations Officer; Renee Spurlin, Senior VP, Analytics & Digital Marketing; Evan Goldberg, Senior VP, Client Service.**

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Since 2003, New York City-based 5W Public Relations (5WPR) has worked with widely known and emerging brands, corporations and high-profile individuals. We have a 360-degree approach to PR, social media, branding and digital marketing that delivers game-changing results to our clients.

Our Tech Practice includes clients from unicorns and *Fortune* 500's across all verticals including FinTech, eCommerce, AdTech, HRTech, AutoTech, Consumer Electronics, eSports & Gaming, Legal Tech, B2C and B2B SAAS. The team is grounded in an entrepreneurial, agile, high-octane culture, an ideal fit for technology companies seeking visibility and relevance in today's fast growing digital world.

The core of our success is our

unmatched ability to distill the complexities of a client's offering and convey it in ways that are both comprehensible and compelling—creating messages that resonate with all stakeholders. We understand that the technology doesn't always drive the story and build programs that integrate corporate positioning and profiling, fundraising announcements, product launches, C-Suite visibility programs, industry and analyst communications, speaking opportunities, digital/performance marketing and issues/crisis PR management.

Client work includes: The Trade Desk, N26, EPICOR, AvidXchange, ironSource, Zeta Global, Xaxis, Triller, CareerBuilder, Airhelp, Avant, Samsung SmartThings and VIZIO.

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ARPR is an award-winning tech PR agency representing cybersecurity, FinTech, cloud and HealthIT brands. From Day 1 we've existed to fill a deep void in specialized subject matter expertise and to bring consistency to the integration of media relations, content marketing, social media and demand generation. As such, ARPR is uniquely built to strategize and execute multi-channel marketing communication campaigns that make our client reputations thrive and their sales pipelines prosper. Driving our Panorama Approach is our team, aka the Army of Awesome, whose collective energy and passion consistently lands us on national and local Best Places to Work lists.

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BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), one of the world's largest full-service global communications agencies, is in the business of moving people on behalf of clients. BCW delivers digitally and data-driven creative content and integrated communications programs grounded in earned media and scaled across all channels for clients in

the B2B, consumer, corporate, crisis management, CSR, health-care, public affairs and technology sectors. BCW is a part of WPP (NYSE: WPP), a creative transformation company.

## BOSPAR

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Hey! Yeah, you, the person reading this.

Is it us, or do all these agency descriptions sound alike?

"We're an integrated global communications and marketing agency that BLAH, BLAH, BLAH."

That's not the kind of thinking that's going to get you noticed.

Yet, the industry has noticed Bospar for our work in tech PR.

PRovoke named us its boutique agency of the year for 2020.

PRWeek named Bospar its "Outstanding Boutique Agency of the Year" for two years in a row.

PRNews included Bospar on its Agency Elite Top 100 list.

Bospar is a team of hard-driving tech PR professionals with purpose and relentless joy for what we do. We are comprised of former jour-



**Bospar: Working From Home Since 2015.**



nalists from social and traditional media and marketing, influencer, financial, SEO and public affairs experts. As a team, we get smart on contact, build relationships and launch PR campaigns, grounded in strategy and infused with creativity.

If you want to get known fast, accelerate adoption, or drive impact, Bospar exceeds all expectations.

With breakthrough coverage and visibility, simply put: our clients speed ahead—no “BLAH, BLAH, BLAH” about it!

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Catapult is a narrative-driven PR and marketing communications agency for B2B tech companies. We blend strategic narrative services, media and analyst relations, social media and content marketing to help clients define new categories, align teams, stand out and win markets. Our Strategic Narrative Marketing approach helps companies discover and share “why” they exist. We are experts at coordinating and executing high-impact company/product launches. The Catapult team has deep knowledge in all major technology markets, including DevOps, agile software development, application development, IT security, cloud, big data, commercial wireless and enterprise platforms that disrupt market norms. Catapult’s success stems from our personal and professional service, along with partner-level account involvement and strategy. Catapult is the preferred agency for technology companies looking for both strategy and execution.

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**To kick off CES, Casio hosted a press conference during which the company introduced its new president, Kazuhiro Kashio, and latest timepiece innovation, the Smart Outdoor Watch WSD-F10. Coyne set up a live stream of the press conference via Casio's YouTube channel so media unable to attend the conference could join in on the announcement.**

**Christine Azzolino**, Senior Account Supervisor

The world of consumer technology is ever-changing. For example, consumer technology was vastly different a year ago, a month ago, and even just a day ago. Technology has drastically altered the way we live, work and play—creating new opportunities and habits in our everyday lives.

As storytellers, our job is to communicate how that technology meets consumer needs. Being able to truly understand the nuances between varying technologies and articulating the consumers benefit is key to positioning your product, your brand, and your expertise as industry leaders. We take an integrated, channel agnostic approach to developing effective communications strategies that have helped everyone from established global brands, to leading innovators and tech startups, translate technology into knowledge.

Coyne has represented many of the most prominent and successful consumer technology brands in the world, including AccuWeather, Casio, DineTime, Engadget, Eureka, HARMAN, IMAX, KEF, littleBits, Midea, Signify, VTech, among others.

We’ve launched countless prod-

ucts, planned and executed scores of events and tradeshows, launched numerous breakthrough campaigns and initiatives, and helped brands navigate significant industry challenges. We live and breathe technology which not only helps us understand the space but enables us to become an extension of the communication and brand teams.

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Current Global, part of the Interpublic Group, is a mid-sized communications agency and multi-disciplined creative powerhouse. Headquartered in Chicago, our footprint spans Asia, Europe, North and South America, with expertise in corporate, consumer, healthcare, and technology communications.

Our approach for every client engagement is based on a deep

understanding of the human experience. We call it Human Communications by Design, and this focus is particularly unique in the tech sector where we merge a heritage in consumer marketing with expertise in complex technologies. This combination of rational (technology) and emotional (humanity) results in ideas that drive real human connection and deliver real business outcomes.

We are seeing a societal shift in how people feel about innovation. What there is still optimism in what’s possible, the days of blindly worshipping at the altar of innovation are fading. In a time of AI, robots and the digital revolution, tech’s future can feel frightening, emphasizing technology and products over people.

We believe technology companies that bring humanity to the forefront of innovation drive deeper and broader engagement and action. Innovation with intention. Innovation for good. Innovation that is transforming entire industries to make things safer, better, stronger, faster for humankind.

We work with companies spanning all sectors of innovation—B2B, B2C, enterprise software, gaming, automotive & mobility, health & medtech, consumer tech, telecommunications and more—to help them Own the Moment by building reputations, engaging audiences, sharing stories and achieving impactful results.

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



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Fahlgren Mortine helps business-to-business brands get to precisely what matters by combining data, design and creativity to build, deploy and measure integrated communications campaigns. Our buyer-centric approach delivers impact-centered strategies and tactics demonstrating a deep understanding of our clients and their customers, and the business triggers that create demand for our clients' products and services. Fahlgren Mortine provides clients with deep knowledge and versatile resources to deliver across a full range of services including branding, public and analyst relations, media planning and buying, content marketing, social media strategy and management, advertising and digital development. Core areas of technology experience: industrial and manufacturing, logistics, data center, software and building products.

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Tech PR is in our DNA. Our team members are specialists in the sector since the early days of bag phones, early personal computers and mainframes. We helped to launch the first noise cancelling headset for Noise Cancellation Technologies; marketed the first consumer mainstream 3D camera for Nimslo; promoted a new tech standard for Israel-based PowerDsine (Power over Ethernet); repositioned ERP software giant IMRS into a new entity called Hyperion Software and so much more.

Today we support emerging tech brands including ClassWallet (fintech) and Silicon Line (active optical cables) and multinational entities including HDMI Licensing Authority, NCSolutions (ad/marketing tech); Nexans and Leclanché (clean tech) and ZeeVee (AV).

Our senior-led team helps our clients to have conversations with marketplace influencers, customers, prospects and distributors about their products, services and corporate values. Our focus is on



**Fahlgren Mortine's B2B Peer Summit Series of in-person and digital interactions engages clients and industry thought leaders on forward-looking trends and topics.**

business outcomes.

Preparing to launch a breakthrough ad technology or introduce new tech for e-commerce? Looking to get industry analyst feedback on an enterprise mobile app? Or determine how to explain to shareholders or prospective investors why a security technology, biotech development, retail tech enhancement or fintech algorithm may change the world? Is your new green technology gearing up to fight global warming? Let's talk!

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With more than 150 professionals across three continents, Finn Partners is the third-largest technology agency in the world. With senior technology professionals in the US, Europe, and Asia, the firm enjoys strong global growth and thrives as one of the agency's largest practice areas.

Today's technology trends are disrupting and altering the way we engage in the world of business, completely changing the dynamics across all industries. We support our clients to address trends like 5G connectivity, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, machine learning, robotic process automation, blockchain and quantum.

The technology revolution impacts every single company. It impacts big technology giants that need to transform and articulate their relevance. It touches hot new startups that must demonstrate their potential, establish credibility, and communicate a new value proposition. It affects non-tech companies that need to act like technology brands by sharing unique stories that underscore how they use technology in new, innovative ways.



**The Feintuch Communications team (Henry Feintuch, left) won two PRSA-NY awards in 2019 for its PR campaign for ZeeVee which increased media coverage by 167% and supported 22% revenue growth in 2018.**

No matter the type of company, you need world-class, seasoned communications professionals who have the ability to grasp the technology landscape, reach the right decision makers, and deliver data-driven business impact.

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Firecracker PR helps you get known, period. Our proven 5-step process—"Ignites"—has helped numerous technology companies rapidly scale their awareness from Day 1. Deep expertise in SaaS, AI, machine learning, cloud, mobile, health tech, smart homes, digital transformation, cybersecurity, consumer electronics, startups and more.

Companies we have worked with include Fujitsu, SRI International, Boeing, HP, Microsoft, D-Link, TP-LINK, Beyond Limits, Baylor University, the American Heart Association and many others.

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Tech companies are made of brilliant people: visionaries who see the future, embrace change and move humanity forward. This requires imagination, drive and determination. Like our clients, FleishmanHillard's Tech sector specialists have these attributes in spades.

But tech companies are also corporations. Like all companies, they operate at the permission of the societies they touch. How they behave, how they communicate, and yes, what they sell, matter. People have expectations of tech companies to be responsible, well-managed and profitable organizations. And we get that too.

FleishmanHillard gives its clients the outside perspective, experience and skills to enable their vision, products and services to thrive; and to flourish in a world that demands responsibility, trans-



**Firecracker PR Managing Partner Edward M. Yang.**

parency and responsiveness.

Members of FleishmanHillard's Tech practice are known for never settling. We put creativity, intelligence and strategy at the heart of solving our clients' challenges and we maintain a focus on DE&I to bring unique perspectives and innovation to the work we deliver. With 80 offices worldwide, we're a seamless global team dedicated to truth and authenticity, driven by insights and bold ideas, and committed to doing what's right.

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With expertise that spans digital, content marketing, and thought

leadership as well as traditional PR, The Hoffman Agency knows how to differentiate brands and deliver air cover for sales. With a heritage in the tech sector, the firm's award-winning work today pushes the boundaries of B2B and consumer communications.

For clients with global needs, the company operates its own offices in Asia Pacific, Europe and the United States. Unlike traditional agencies handicapped by their siloed structure, The Hoffman Agency applies a collaborative approach to implementing multi-country campaigns, leveraging content and thinking across geographies with a single-point-contact for clients. Built on the firm's cultural foundation of teamwork and trust, this approach consistently generates better results.

While campaigns vary by client and industry, all share one theme: the creation of content that reflects the key 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. The firm also conducts storytelling workshops that orient Hoffman employees and client stakeholders around this shared goal.

Even on the operations side, The Hoffman Agency walks to a different drummer. Eschewing the traditional focus on the financial side—measuring account people based on their "billability"—the firm adheres to the belief that if you deliver great work to the client, financial performance will follow. This fosters a culture of personal accountability and ownership, and an environment in which everyone is valued for their contribution.

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Hotwire is a global tech commu-

nications consultancy 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, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Australia, together with a partner network that includes The Hoffman Agency in Asia and VI-ANEWS in Brazil as well as other non-exclusive affiliate partners.

For more information, please visit [www.hotwireglobal.com](http://www.hotwireglobal.com).

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ICR brings equal parts business acumen, technology expertise and media savvy to every account, for clients spanning all business stages—from startups seeking to raise additional capital, growth companies with IPOs or SPACs on the horizon, organizations investing in M&A, businesses in the throws of digital transformation, and public companies seeking to elevate their brands. Comprised of former Wall Street analysts working alongside seasoned PR agency and in-house communications experts, ICR offers a unique combination of experience, contacts, and skills that helps technology companies generate the types of stories that both capture mind share and grow market share.

Embracing a roll-up your sleeves approach from senior members to associates, the team delivers results for clients across a range of sectors, including Artificial Intelligence, Automotive Technology, Digital Payments & Ecommerce, Fintech, Martech & Adtech, Data & Analytics, Cybersecurity, Crypto Currency, IT and IoT. ICR maintains offices in New York, Connecticut, Boston, Baltimore, San Diego, San Francisco and Beijing.

Clients: HARMAN (wholly owned subsidiary of Samsung Electronics), Mobileye/Intel, Marqeta, BigCommerce, Cherwell, Dynatrace, TechStyle Fashion Group and Scout (a Workday company).



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Inkhouse is an integrated PR agency for innovative thinkers, creators and leaders who believe in the power of stories to effect positive change. We bring new ideas to market. We were founded in 2007 and have grown to an agency of more than 100 people across four offices.

Find us in the real world in Bos-

ton, New York, San Francisco and Seattle and in the digital one at www.inkhouse.com. Client shortlist: Atomwise, AT&T Cybersecurity, Blume Global, Capella Space, Cockroach Labs, Databricks, Datto, Engie, EvGo, Fuze, Neo4j, Next Insurance, Nutanix, Okta, Raytheon, SmartRent, Strava, Talespin, TransferWise, and Xerox.

## KARBO COMMUNICATIONS

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Additional offices in New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle, Washington, DC and Redwood City

**Julie Karbo**, Founder & CEO

Karbo Communications is a top ranked, full-service technology PR and marketing agency that delivers sales and market leadership. With Karbo Com, you don't get bench players. You get the industry's top marketing and PR teams working with you every day, whether it's elevating brand identity, scoring top tier media recognition, deploying content marketing strategies, driving traffic, building communities, or pioneering partnerships. We've pioneered marketing and PR efforts across categories and industries, such as cloud/SaaS, mobile, the IIoT/IoT, social, data, analytics, apps, marketing and advertising tech, security, high performance

computing, AI, augmented reality and communications.

The Karbo Com team has worked extensively with both B2B and consumer tech companies, including Apple, eBay Advertising, NerdWallet, TIBCO, Hootsuite, Penguin Computing, The IoT World Conference, Equinix, Cisco, AppDynamics, Defense.Net, GoDaddy, Fox Digital, Airbnb, Logitech, 8th Wall, Oracle, TDK, RTI, 500 Startups and Intel. Our clients range from stealth startups to billion-dollar global brands. When it's make or break, you want the best. You want a team that's seen it all, yet knows the latest and greatest trends, technologies and tools. At Karbo Com, we have a track record of delivering revenues, industry-leading stature, partners and funding.

Current clients include Hootsuite, Prometheus World, Penguin Computing, RTI (Real-Time Innovations), Wizeline, Victorious SEO, Sendinblue, Incognia and Subtext.

## LANDIS COMMUNICATIONS INC. (LCI)

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**Brianne Murphy Miller**, Business Development Manager  
**David Landis**, President

Innovation is what keeps our world moving forward. At award-winning Landis Communications Inc. (LCI), we recognize the importance of marketing and promoting new and innovative technologies, both business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C). Based in San Francisco/Silicon Valley (the nexus of tech innovation), LCI's team works with clients in all areas of the technology sector, including lidar, AI, consumer tech, consumer electronics, cloud computing, cyber security, enterprise applications, biotech, energy, B2B tech, the sharing economy, B2B storage, the Internet of Things, startups and more that are constantly disrupting the status quo in business.

A key differentiator is LCI's proprietary Promised Results program, which provides clients with tangible ROI metrics. As a full service marketing/communications agency, LCI helps forward-thinking technology organizations achieve stated business goals—

and helps them communicate in a meaningful and understandable way. Our tech clients include: Velodyne Lidar (the technology that allows self-driving cars to "see"), Match.com, Seleguity (online commercial real estate), TRUSTe (online privacy certification) and more. More info here. Contact LCI's Brianne Murphy Miller at: brianne@landispr.com.

## LAUNCHSQUAD

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LaunchSquad is a strategic communications and public relations agency with offices in San Francisco, New York, Boston, and Chicago (but currently operating entirely remotely).

Since 2000, we've focused exclusively on helping innovative and fast-growing companies build their brands, become market leaders and change the world. Our expertise spans both consumer-facing and B2B clients in a variety of industries, including consumer technology, enterprise software, healthcare, fashion, retail, media & entertainment, e-commerce, education, finance, energy and more.

We work with our clients to deeply understand, shape and illuminate their stories and then share and spread them through an integrated mix of earned and owned media strategies, from media relations and content marketing to social media and visual storytelling. We have an unlimited amount of energy and enthusiasm for new ideas, and that passion translates to smart, hard work. Over the last 20 years, our team has collected deep media relationships and insights, and are consistently tapped into the trends, issues and challenges driving our clients' industries. We spend time in the trenches every day, delivering real results and exceeding expectations.

Current clients include American Giant, Cornerstone OnDemand, Docusign, Getty Images, ICF, iHeart Media, Netflix, NOBULL, Nuro, Poshmark, Twitch and Uber among dozens of other fast growth private and public companies.

## MATTER

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LCI's team receives San Francisco PRSA's Agency of the Year award.



**Scott Signore**, Principal + CEO  
**Patty Barry**, Principal  
**Mandy Mladenoff**, President  
**Maria Brown**, General Manager of Matter West

Matter is a Brand Elevation Agency unifying PR, creative services, digital marketing and strategy into content-rich communications campaigns that inspire action and build value. Founded in 2003, with seven offices spanning North America, Matter works with the world's most innovative B2B and B2C technology companies—from start-ups to global brands—across the tech spectrum including AI, big data, cybersecurity, enterprise software and services, retail technology, storage and more.

Matter has a nearly 20-year track record of helping technology companies increase awareness with stakeholders in an impactful, relatable way to build credibility and relevance, heighten audience engagement and help shorten sales cycles.

Clients include: Agora, Attivo Networks, Auth0, Blue Yonder, HITACHI, Johnson Controls, Nerdio, Zebra Analytics (Profitect), Sectio, Sormatic and VERITAS.

## MERRITT GROUP

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**Shahed Ahmed**, SVP, Senior Partner  
**Michelle Schafer**, SVP, Partner

Merritt Group is an award-winning, woman-owned strategic communications firm founded in 1996 in Northern Virginia. We are a mid-sized agency with locations in McLean, Virginia, San Francisco, California and North Texas. Merritt Group specializes in public relations, content creation, marketing, social media, demand and lead generation, analytics and measurement, and marketing infrastructure consulting.

The success of our client campaigns are grounded in our extensive domain knowledge in hot technology areas like cybersecurity, AI, IoT, cloud, and mobile, as well as verticals such as government, healthcare, supply chain, finance, and more. Our philosophy starts

with intrinsically understanding our PR clients' target audiences, which leads to the development of powerful messaging and creative marketing, PR, content programs that drives high impact awareness, engages audiences and accelerates sales around their innovations.

Our client roster includes organizations ranging from large, global tech leaders to emerging, venture-backed innovators.

Merritt Group's philosophy starts with understanding our clients' target audiences and markets and developing powerful messages and creative programs that create awareness for their innovations. Our in-depth knowledge of our clients' competitors, industry trends and influencers turns our campaigns into immediate ROI for their business.

We pride ourselves on delivering insightful, strategic communications approaches that take full advantage of the intersection of media, digital and creative based on analytical research. While the landscape has evolved, our passion for consistently delivering high-quality, well-executed creative campaigns is undiminished. Our goal is to help the world's most inspiring companies share viewpoints that get people talking and keep their audiences engaged. We also have built our business on the expertise of our people by procuring and developing the industry's best talent. We foster innovation and experimentation that allows our people to develop their careers to their fullest potential and, in the process, deliver incredible service and value to our clients.

At Merritt Group, we are family. We are go-getters, authentic, and love a balanced and fulfilling work life. The agency places employee culture as a top priority, which has resulted in an industry-low turnover rate.

## PADILLA

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 PadillaCo.com

**Amy Fisher**, Vice President/  
 Technology Lead

Padilla is an independently operated, globally resourced public relations and communication company with offices across the United States. The agency builds, grows and protects brands and reputations worldwide by creating purposeful connections with the people who matter most through public rela-



One of Merritt's foundational values is giving back to our community, and it has served as an integral part of what makes our agency culture unique and sought after. In addition to ongoing volunteer time off programs, we plan an annual Merry Week of Giving that allows our team to partake in a week of off-site and in-office volunteer efforts, one of which you see pictured here. We've partnered with DC Central Kitchen for the past 4 years to ensure our local community is able to enjoy the holiday season.

tions, advertising, digital and social marketing, investor relations and brand strategy. Padilla includes the brand consultancy of Joe Smith, the food and nutrition experts at Food-Minds, and the research authorities at SMS Research Advisors.

Padilla's Technology Practice helps complex B2B technology brands reach and influence prospective buyers and customers, partners, investors and employees through targeted, compelling brand stories. Clients include enterprise hardware, software and services, AI, cloud, IoT, big data/analytics, mobility, blockchain, networking and security, engineering and materials science organizations. Padilla's Technology team consists of experts helping tech companies sell into verticals such as retail, hospitality and CX, health care, education, finance, marketing, industrial, agriculture and transportation.

We service clients of all sizes such as 3M, HealthPrize, Rockwell Automation, Calabrio, Direct Source and Outlier AI.

Padilla is an AVENIR GLOBAL company and a founding member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, a partnership of 132 independently owned partner offices in 115 cities on six continents. Connect with purpose at PadillaCo.com.

## PAN COMMUNICATIONS

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**Mark Nardone**, Executive Vice President  
**Elizabeth Famiglietti**, Executive Vice President, Human Resources  
**Darlene Doyle**, Executive Vice President, Client Relations  
**Gary Torpey**, Executive Vice President, Finance  
**Gene Carozza**, **Dan Martin**, **Nikki Festa O'Brien**, **Meg Kessler**, Senior Vice Presidents  
**Gareth Thomas**, Managing Director, UK

PAN Communications is a leading integrated marketing and PR agency servicing tech and healthcare brands. With office locations in Boston, San Francisco, New York, Orlando and London, PAN helps companies transform ideas into captivating stories and coveted user experiences that align to their growth strategies. With a staff of 150+ strong, PAN is a mid-sized

Continued on page 42

## PAN COMMUNICATIONS

Continued from page 41

agency that is positioned to help brands emerge in new markets and drive integrated strategy across a variety of media channels.

Connected Content—Creative Storytelling—Results that Matter!

Clients Include: 8x8, athenahealth, Braze, BMC, Carbon Lighthouse, Citrix, CloudBees, Degreed, LeanTaaS, GreatCall, GYANT, Health Dialog, MediaMath, OneStream, Quanterix, Quorum Software, Radial, Rapid7, Toast, Veeam, and White Ops.

## PEPPERCOMM

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**Ann Barlow**, Senior Partner & President, West Coast  
**Stephen Corsi**, Senior Partner & Chief Digital Officer  
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**Maggie O'Neill**, Senior Partner & Chief Client Officer  
**Tara Lilien**, Partner & Chief Talent Officer

An independently owned, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm combines 26 award-winning years of expertise serving blue chip and breakout clients with forward-thinking new service offerings and the freshness of a start-up. This unique mix of experience and energy attracts and empowers teams with a creative edge and a passion for breaking through in an ever-changing marketplace.

We offer a fully integrated suite of services that reach and influence our clients' audiences along the paid, earned, shared and owned spectrum. As the industry and culture have evolved, Peppercomm has proven to be more than a communications agency. We've adapted and extended our services to better address our clients' growing needs—whether it is navigating a societal crisis, changing the perception of a brand, industry, or product, or attracting and retaining top talent.

As a team, we are creative storytellers, informed by research, insights, data with deep expertise in

the financial and professional services sectors.

In today's environment where stakeholder sentiment can sway from fear to anger to despair to hope and back again, brands are challenged to determine the messages their audiences want and need to hear. To help organizations navigate how to best communicate with their stakeholders, Peppercomm created Mindset.AI, a new analytics dashboard designed to help brands effectively map their customer's emotional mindset.

Mindset.AI is based on the firm's 26 years of experience in data analytics and developing corporate crisis and post-crisis strategies for Fortune 1000 brands across industries including financial and professional services, agriculture, manufacturing, food and beverage, hospitality, automotive, technology, and travel.

Visit [www.peppercomm.com](http://www.peppercomm.com) or find us @Peppercomm.

## PROFILE ADVISORS

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**Rich Myers**, Co-Founder and Managing Partner  
**Greg Marose**, Co-Founder and Partner

Profile is a communications consultancy built to represent FinTech companies. By pairing a high-touch senior advisory model with the full-service communications resources needed to navigate today's always-on world, we are able to develop and implement differentiated multi-channel communications programs.

Headquartered in New York City, our expert team constructs a tailored approach for established and emerging FinTech entities, technology companies, trading firms, and investment managers. We help companies build and protect their brand through deep media connectivity, extensive conference relationships, and a full-service design and digital offering. At Profile, we enable our clients to see around corners as political shifts, social movements, and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the capital markets and technology sector.

Select clients include: Behavox, ClearList, GTS, HouseCanary, and iConnections.

Learn how Profile can help you build your brand and generate revenue at [www.profileadvisors.com](http://www.profileadvisors.com).

## RACEPOINT GLOBAL

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**Larry Weber**, Chairman & CEO  
**Bob Osmond**, President  
**Carolyn Regan**, SVP, People  
**Philip Chadwick**, SVP, Finance

Society has always been propelled forward by technology. There is a growing expectation, however, that innovation must serve humanity—there must be a higher moral purpose than innovating only because we can.

We believe that the complex challenges we face as a global society can only be tackled by embracing creativity and innovation fueled by purpose. Every company in every category is in some way using technology to sustainably change the way we work, live and play.

At Racepoint Global (RPG), our mission is simple: We help our clients navigate and succeed in the new communications landscape by shaping the conversations that matter. We live at the intersection of conversation and innovation and we serve clients with channel-agnostic communications strategies that engage their target audiences in authentic and meaningful ways. Our work with clients establishes competitive differentiation and drives business impact.

Capabilities: Media & Analyst Relations, Digital Marketing, Influencer Engagement, Strategy & Comms. Planning, Creative Strategy, Video & Content Production, Media Training, Paid Media, Crisis Communications, Public Affairs, Event Management & Support, Measurement & Analytics.

## RAFFETTO HERMAN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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**John Raffetto**, CEO  
**David Herman**, President  
**Jen Bemisderfer**, Managing Director, DC  
**Hally Wax**, Senior Vice President, Technology

RH Strategic is an award-winning public relations agency working to introduce the world to the next generation of innovators in technology, government and healthcare.

The RH Strategic brand is strategy and disruption. Our work has helped clients who are challenging the status quo enter and own new markets, influence public policy, grow revenues, recruit top talent, attract capital investment and get acquired.

Our technology practice covers a number of specialized business-to-business markets including cybersecurity, privacy, IOT, machine learning & AI, Saas, biometrics, identity, and digital payments. We also work at the intersection of technology and healthcare, government, education, and financial services.

The RH Strategic team of 30 full professionals is based in offices in Seattle and Washington DC, and in remote offices throughout the U.S.. We're a partner in the Worldcom Public Relations Group, spanning 132 offices in 49 countries on six continents.

## RUDER FINN INC.

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**Michael Schubert**, CIO  
**Tejas Totade**, CTO  
**Robin Kim**, Global Head of Technology and Innovation  
**Travis Murdock**, Exec. VP, Technology.

Ruder Finn is one of the world's largest independent global communications and creative agencies. Founded in 1948, Ruder Finn has defined and redefined PR for more than 70 years, shaping communications that help move industry-defining brands, companies and leaders from what's now to what's next. Headquartered in New York, Ruder Finn provides clients with bold communications strategies based on a global perspective and localized market knowledge that redefine leadership, reimagine the marketplace, and rethink customer experiences around a shared sense of purpose.

With Technology & Innovation as one of the agency's core areas of



focus, Ruder Finn helps companies tell compelling stories of transformative innovation and sell the next generation of virtual and real-world technologies, products, and services. The RF TechLab maintains an active network of emerging tech partners for experimentation and ideation, while incubating new apps, skills and tools across emerging technologies and developing new and strategic data-informed options for clients at the intersection of emerging technologies and the future of the communications industry.

Technology expertise areas include:

- Audience engagement
- Augmented, virtual, and mixed reality
- Chatbot personalization
- Conversational AI
- Data-driven ROI measurement
- Deterministic targeting
- Developer relations
- Dynamic video
- Industry analyst relations
- IPOs and special transactions
- Media intelligence & media relations
- Mobile analytics
- Marketing automation
- Product marketing
- Real-time, on-demand market research
- Robotics
- Stakeholder modeling
- Sentimental intelligence
- Social intelligence
- Virtual events and VUI/UX
- Voice apps
- Web/mobile platform development

Sample technology clients include: 3M, Bluescape, CyberSource, Elastic, Google, Kite, Pensando, Privoro, Tencent, Visa, VIVO, Xiaomi.

## SOURCECODE COMMUNICATIONS

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sourcecodecommunications.com

**Rebecca Honeyman**, Co-Founder and Managing Partner  
**Greg Mondshein**, Co-Founder and Managing Partner

*PRWeek's* 2020 Boutique Agency of the Year, SourceCode Communications is an award-winning communications marketing agency launched in 2017 by technology PR industry veterans Greg Mondshein and Rebecca Honeyman. Based in New York, the agency is focused on delivering measurable business impact to brands in six major sectors: Consumer Technology, Lifestyle



**Touchdown PR's international team regularly connects wherever they are in the world!**

Technology, Financial Technology, Mobile, Cloud & Telecoms, Insights & Engagement, and Enterprise Technology. The agency takes a multidisciplinary approach to B2B and B2C communications and uses the SourceCode StoryHub, its own proprietary creative process, to inform all creative planning to design stories that evoke emotion and action in clients' core audiences.

## TOUCHDOWN PR

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www.touchdownpr.com

**James Carter**, CEO  
**Emily Gallagher**, EVP

Touchdown PR is an international agency focused on helping B2B technology clients build brand awareness and differentiators in order to increase sales and achieve successful exits. With headquarters in Austin, TX and offices across Europe, the agency has 50+ employees specializing in security, data protection, artificial intelligence, storage and lots more. Clients choose to work with Touchdown PR because we deliver solid results across multi-region campaigns and work as true partners. With well-established media relationships in focused industries, including business, technology, verticals and channels, the team at Touchdown knows how to uncover stories and deliver content that will drive key audiences to action. Touchdown welcomes the opportunity to work with innovative tech-

nology brands, from VC-funded startups to large, publicly listed enterprises that are changing the status quo.

## TREVELINO/KELLER

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As Atlanta continues to establish itself as one of the country's technology growth sectors, Trevelino/Keller continues to leverage its depth with emerging and middle market brands and its strategic partnerships with organizations such as Atlanta Tech Village, Atlanta Tech Angels, TechAlpharetta, Raise Forum, LaunchPad FN and Keiretsu Forum. Not limited by geography, its emerging, middle market and national technology clients can be found across the country.

Trevelino/Keller's long-standing pedigree in technology continues to be its economic engine. It's powered in part by its cross fertilization across its seven other practices, yielding a powerful vertical prowess in areas such as Fin-Tech, Consumer-Tech, Clean-Tech, Food-Tech, Fashion-Tech, Ag-Tech, Ed-Tech and Health IT. In partnership with the Technology Association of Georgia, T/K continues its annual representation of FinTech South, which features one of Atlanta's more dominant industries. A slight shift in the firm's services based on demand has re-

sulted in both the expansion of consolidation to three areas—public relations, integrated marketing and creative services, all of which have experienced record growth despite the pandemic. Its persona-based focus around Disruptive Forces, Category Pioneers, Stealth Leaders and Wonder Women continues to be well received by companies who align with one or more of the personas.

Finishing up 2020 with some of its best months on record, T/K anticipates strong growth in 2021, having recruited an additional 15 percent of staff in Q3, as well as an expansion of its office to accommodate a healthy, hybrid and flexible remote model. Coming off of one of its best years, including a #2 ranking in Atlanta, as well as nine #1, #2 or #3 industry rankings, the firm is in an exceptional position to take advantage of a sustained economic recovery in 2021.

## WALKER SANDS

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Additional offices in San Francisco and Seattle

**Mike Santoro**, President and Partner  
**Ken Gaebler**, CEO and Partner

Walker Sands is a full-service B2B marketing agency with core capabilities in public relations, demand generation, branding, creative, marketing strategy and web. For two decades, we've pushed the limits of what B2B marketing can do to get the results and recognition our clients deserve. We pride ourselves on helping B2B brands reach their goals—whether that's increasing revenue, pushing into new markets, attracting top talent, going public or getting acquired.

Our mission is to accelerate the growth of B2B companies. Through strategic programs tailored to meet our clients' needs, we offer a full range of marketing expertise—from strategy to execution—to provide endless possibilities for B2B brands.

Our integrated approach to marketing drives awareness, credibility and conversions for 100+ B2B technology and professional services clients around the world. An eight-time *Inc.* 5000 honoree, we're one of the fastest-growing B2B marketing agencies in the world, with offices in Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle. ○



## Diamond steps down as McCann CEO

**P**R pro Harris Diamond is stepping down as CEO of Interpublic's flagship McCann Worldgroup ad agency after an eight-year run. COO Bill Kolb will assume the top spot at the end of the year.

Diamond joined McCann after leading IPG's constituency management group for eight years and helming Weber Shandwick for nearly 17 years.

He first made his mark in PR at the legendary Sawyer Miller Group, where he had an eight-year run. Diamond said after 35 years of building a PR business and leading global marketing communications at IPG, it's time to look at new horizons. ○



Harris Diamond

## APCO names Wheelless equity, justice head

**C**harlene Wheelless, most recently VP-Global Corporate Affairs at Bechtel Corp., is now Senior Advisor for Equity and Justice Issues at independent firm APCO Worldwide.

She will advise APCO and its clients on equity, justice, diversity and inclusion issues. Wheelless also will counsel clients on purpose, crisis management, internal communications and organizational change.



Charlene Wheelless

At Bechtel, Wheelless handled worldwide communications, issues, reputation management, sustainability and PA. Before joining the engineering giant, she was VP-Communications at Raytheon's intelligence & information systems unit and Senior VP Global Communications and Marketing at American Management Systems.

Wheelless also chairs the Arthur W. Page Society. ○

## Nissan ups Witherspoon to U.S. CMO

**N**issan has promoted Allyson Witherspoon to U.S. Chief Marketing Officer. Witherspoon has most recently served as Vice President, Marketing Com-

munications and Media, and she has also been General Manager for Global Brand Engagement for the company in Japan.

Before coming to the Japanese car giant, she was Director of Marketing Communications for INFINITI and Global Business Director at Havas Worldwide.

In her new post, Witherspoon is responsible for marketing communications and media, data innovation and customer experience, enhancing brand value, customer trust and insights and product marketing. ○



Allyson Witherspoon

## Calvin Klein names Starbucks' Peters CMO

**C**alvin Klein named Linh Peters Global Chief Marketing Officer. Peters comes to the company from Starbucks, where she has most recently served as Vice President, Loyalty, Partnerships and Licensed Stores Product and Marketing. She has also held senior marketing roles at Ulta Beauty and Target.

At Calvin Klein, she will oversee all aspects of its consumer marketing organization, working to develop the company's brand experience, product marketing and data-driven marketing innovation.

Peters succeeds Marie Gulin-Merle, who is now Vice President of Global Ads Marketing at Google. ○



Linh Peters

## BCW hires brand guru Glazer

**B**CW has hired Lauren Glazer, who has spent the past five years leading the engagement group at Omnicom's Batten Group brand consulting boutique, as Chief Brand Officer.

A goal is to expand BCW's brand beyond its traditional offerings to clients that need the firm's capabilities in research, analytics, advertising, earned/paid media and e-commerce.

Glazer made her branding mark at the Union Square Hos-



Lauren Glazer

pitality Group, where she once served as brand ambassador for a hot dog cart in Madison Square Park that later grew into Shake Shack.

She went on to hold key posts at ad agencies BBDO and Weiden+Kennedy and has counseled clients such as Delta Air Lines, ExxonMobil, Johnson & Johnson, Lincoln Financial Group and Tiffany & Co.

BCW CEO Donna Imperato praised Glazer's "deep understanding of the branding process, from research and positioning through strategy and creative execution." ○

## Giglio Exits Kekst CNC for Rubenstein rebound

**C**hris Giglio, who joined Kekst CNC in January, has rejoined Rubenstein as Managing Director.

From 2005 to 2007, Giglio served as an Executive VP at the firm. Giglio previously served as Chief Strategic Officer of HL Group and VP, Global Communications at The Estée Lauder Companies.

He has also worked as an investigative reporter at NBC News.

At Rubenstein, he will provide strategic counsel and crisis planning to a diverse portfolio of clients across sectors including finance, media, entertainment, technology, real estate, sports, healthcare, education, culture and philanthropy. ○



Chris Giglio

## Lux Capital grabs Google alum Rubin

**L**ux Capital, an early stage venture capital firm that invests in emerging science and technology, has named former Google Director of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs Scott Rubin Chief Marketing Officer, a newly created role at the company.

Rubin joins Lux from computer software company Atlassian, where he served as Vice President of Brand and Communications. He has also been CMO at information tech company Tanium. At Lux, Rubin will lead brand, marketing and communications for the company, as well as providing strategic counsel to its portfolio companies. ○



Scott Rubin

# O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

## TOP TECHNOLOGY PR FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2019)	Firm	Net Fees (2019)
1. <b>Edelman</b> , New York, NY	\$274,677,000	33. <b>Trevelino/Keller</b> , Atlanta, GA	\$1,700,000
2. <b>Hotwire</b> , New York, NY	42,161,713	34. <b>Brownstein Group</b> , Philadelphia, PA	1,548,647
3. <b>Finn Partners</b> , New York, NY	32,106,000	35. <b>Peppercomm</b> , New York, NY	1,274,327
4. <b>Zeno Group</b> , New York, NY	22,648,226	36. <b>Jackson Spalding</b> , Atlanta, GA	1,192,453
5. <b>Highwire PR</b> , San Francisco, CA	19,595,186	37. <b>French   West   Vaughan</b> , Raleigh, NC	799,308
6. <b>PAN Communications</b> , Boston, MA	19,344,484	38. <b>Padilla</b> , Minneapolis, MN	792,669
7. <b>Walker Sands</b> , Chicago, IL	18,832,290	39. <b>360PR+</b> , Boston, MA	724,514
8. <b>ICR</b> , New York, NY	16,671,011	40. <b>Pierpont Communications</b> , Houston, TX	564,500
9. <b>MWWPR</b> , New York, NY	15,013,280	41. <b>Prosek Partners</b> , New York, NY	525,000
10. <b>Hoffman Agency, The</b> , San Jose, CA	15,005,000	42. <b>Bob Gold &amp; Associates</b> , Redondo Beach, CA	518,102
11. <b>Racepoint Global</b> , Boston, MA	14,818,082	43. <b>Feintuch Communications</b> , New York, NY	488,180
12. <b>W2O Group</b> , San Francisco, CA	13,952,000	44. <b>Landis Communications</b> , San Francisco, CA	357,500
13. <b>Inkhouse</b> , Waltham, MA	11,342,681	45. <b>Standing Partnership</b> , St. Louis, MO	331,540
14. <b>Shift Communications</b> , Boston, MA	10,953,765	46. <b>Greentarget Global LLC</b> , Chicago, IL	322,250
15. <b>5W Public Relations</b> , New York, NY	9,000,000	47. <b>MP&amp;F Strategic Communications</b> , Nashville, TN	258,837
16. <b>Fahlgren Mortine</b> (includes TURNER), Columbus, OH	8,799,734	48. <b>Approach Marketing</b> , Worthington, OH	248,624
17. <b>Matter Communications</b> , Newburyport, MA	8,689,663	49. <b>Bradford Group, The</b> , Nashville, TN	210,102
18. <b>LaunchSquad</b> , San Francisco, CA	8,032,000	50. <b>BizCom Associates</b> , Plano, TX	159,145
19. <b>Bospar</b> , San Francisco, CA	5,692,505	51. <b>Hunter</b> , New York, NY	150,000
20. <b>Touchdown PR</b> , Austin, TX	4,884,345	52. <b>Akrete</b> , Evanston, IL	148,344
21. <b>March Communications</b> , Boston, MA	4,693,059	53. <b>O'Malley Hansen Communications</b> , Chicago, IL	119,000
22. <b>Lumina Communications</b> , San Jose, CA	4,505,079	54. <b>rbb Communications</b> , Miami, FL	110,003
23. <b>Havas Formula</b> , New York, NY	3,400,395	55. <b>WordWrite Communications LLC</b> , Pittsburgh, PA	109,000
24. <b>SourceCode Communications</b> , New York, NY	3,342,813	56. <b>Konnect Agency</b> , Los Angeles, CA	89,983
25. <b>Idea Grove</b> , Dallas, TX	3,288,889	57. <b>Singer Associates, Inc.</b> , San Francisco, CA	38,416
26. <b>Crenshaw Communications</b> , New York, NY	3,047,435	58. <b>Tunheim</b> , Minneapolis, MN	35,215
27. <b>ARPR</b> , Atlanta, GA	2,631,389	59. <b>Champion Management Group</b> , Dallas, TX	30,000
28. <b>Raffetto Herman Strategic Comms.</b> , Seattle, WA	2,559,996	60. <b>FrazierHeiby</b> , Columbus, OH	15,481
29. <b>Karbo Communications</b> , San Francisco, CA	2,395,720	61. <b>Zapwater Communications</b> , Chicago, IL	7,893
30. <b>Coyne PR</b> , Parsippany, NJ	2,100,000	62. <b>Beehive Strategic Communication</b> , St. Paul, MN	6,019
31. <b>TruePoint Communications</b> , Dallas, TX	2,066,442	63. <b>Buchanan Public Relations</b> , Bryn Mawr, PA	4,930
32. <b>Kivvit</b> , Chicago, IL	1,740,170	64. <b>Judge Public Relations, LLC</b> , Tampa, FL	1,169

# The real reason for Trump's defeat: public relations

By Fraser P. Seitel

**A**mong the saddest manifestations of today's new "journalism"—right up there with the demise of objectivity at *The New York Times*—is the embarrassing devolution of Brian Williams.



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

Five years ago, Williams was Lester Holt, riding high as the admired anchor of the NBC Nightly News. Then suddenly, Williams made up a bizarre story about bravely surviving an Iraqi War attack, and NBC demoted him to its minor-league franchise, MSNBC, where the once-revered journalist continues each evening to toe his employer's left wing line.

So, it wasn't surprising after the final 2020 Presidential debate that Williams eagerly leapt to condemn the performance of the reviled Donald Trump.

Had Williams not been banished to the network's dark side and remained NBC news anchor, it's likely his assessment of Trump's debate would've been much more nuanced and positive.

In point of fact—and despite what you learned from the Trump-hating, Democrat-favoring media—for this one brief moment, Trump finally demonstrated why 40 percent of the voting public adores him. He was strong yet restrained—obviously, the valium kicked in—specific about his Administration's multiple pre-COVID accomplishments—from economic expansion to China tariffs to prison reform—and pointed in his criticism of his opponent's striking lack of accomplishments in 50 years in politics.

The problem for the President was that it was too little, too late. And as America's experiment with the frenetic presidency of Donald Trump crashes to a close, the soon-to-be-former President can blame one culprit in particular: public relations.

Trump was destined to be defeated by the weakest presidential candidate since a scrawny Michael Dukakis donned a helmet and climbed into a tank. For the megalomaniacal Trump, such a defeat to such a limited adversary is as frightening as it is inexplicable. How could a past-his-prime, out-of-touch glad-hander like Joe Biden be kept in a basement for the length of the battle only to emerge victorious against an opponent so clearly more competent and better qualified?

The long answer: Trump's resolute refusal to accept the counsel of others and his conviction that he, above all others, possessed the best instincts to win caused his failure to win the votes of fence sitters in swing states and ultimately led to his stunning political demise. The short answer: public relations.

Three Trumpian public relations misjudgments in the campaign's crucial final weeks prove the point.

## First, he bad-mouthed a beloved icon

One enduring principle of public relations is that you don't attack individuals who enjoy great public approval, like Mother Theresa or Peyton Manning or the Pope.

In today's COVID America, where everybody despises everybody else, there's at least one esteemed individual who basks in near universal acclaim, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert.

Dr. Fauci is our favorite uncle—wise, understated, a former ball player, a little guy with a big heart. And even Donald Trump recognized Fauci's ubiquitous appeal and wisely gave him a wide berth to reinforce his views and independence. "Gave" him, that is, right up until the worst possible moment.

In a phone call three weeks before Election Day to campaign supporters—with anti-Trump reporters listening in—the President gratuitously lambasted Fauci as a "disaster," whose advice—like other scientist "idiots"—was often misguided.

Anti-Trump reporters couldn't believe their good luck, jumping on the Fauci comment with glee, while Trump supporters universally wondered, "Who asked you?"

The presumed damage of Trump's comments was that the last thing needed by fence-sitting, swing state voters—the only ones who really count at this point—was a reminder of the candidate's juvenile bellicosity, particularly directed at such an honorable target.

The public relations advice the candidate disregarded: "just shut up."

## Second, he squandered his moment of humility

Public relations advisors uniformly

counsel their clients to exemplify humility, to reinforce their "humanness." Humility, of course, has never been Donald Trump's strong suit. But when he contracted COVID-19, the President seemed to experience an epiphany.

After entering Walter Reed Hospital, a tieless, subdued Trump addressed the American people on his new-found respect for and understanding of this deadly disease. He gratefully lauded his doctors and graciously thanked his friends and adversaries alike for their well-wishes.

Finally, it appeared, Donald Trump had gotten religion.

And then he decided to take a joy ride. Specifically, Trump, still testing negative for COVID and a potential disease spreader, rather than staying put in his hospital room, commandeered his security staff to take him on a car ride around the hospital grounds to wave to his fans.

Again, on cue, the nation's stupefied cadre of Trump-bashing reporters seized the opportunity to underscore the President's continuing failure to fear the contagious disease that he'd contracted; while swing voters grimaced and PR counselors gasped at one man's uncanny, unconscious, continuing ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

## Third, a disastrous first debate

The fundamental public relations advice going into that key first meeting with Joe Biden was at least to "follow the rules." And we all know how that worked out.

All but the most rabid Trump boosters had to acknowledge that the President's imbecilic, infantile, interfering display of bombast was likely the final, fatal straw for swing voters tired of the mind-bending, never-ending, self-imposed drama surrounding the nation's 45th President.

And so, even with a stellar final debate performance, Donald Trump's presidential goose was cooked.

It was Trump's blatant lack of understanding about public relations and failure to accept more knowledgeable experts' advice that caused him to blunder badly, sacrifice most of the good will his formidable administration accomplishments had gained with swing voters and lose an election that even with COVID, he could've—and should've—won.

To paraphrase yet another scholar whom Donald Trump has probably never listened to, "The fault, dear Donald, is not in your stars, but in yourself." ○



# The home office deduction after COVID-19

By Richard Goldstein

With the onset of COVID, many PR firms are working remotely from their homes. For example, Buchbinder is a three-office CPA firm with the offices located in New York, New Jersey and Maryland. I personally work from our New Jersey office; the last time I went to the office there were three professionals working including me. So, where did everyone go? They're working from home. This includes the partners who are considered self-employed. The question then is who can deduct home office expenses?



**Richard Goldstein** is a partner at Buchbinder Tunick & Company LLP, New York, Certified Public Accountants.

## Office in the Home

Most expenses for personal use assets are not deductible. The exception is primarily interest and taxes. While interest is generally deductible, taxes are limited to a maximum deduction of \$10,000. However, self-employed persons are allowed a deduction for office in the home expenses. Unfortunately, owners of a regular corporation (a C corporation) or a Subchapter S corporation aren't considered self-employed and the office in the home deduction will not apply. However, self-employed individuals are allowed a deduction for home office expenses if a portion of their home is used exclusively on a regular basis as either the principal place of business for the firm, or a place of business used by clients.

From 2018 through 2025, employees aren't allowed an office in the home deduction because these expenses are considered miscellaneous itemized deductions that aren't deductible until possibly 2026. (This assumes Congress doesn't extend the provision eliminating itemized deductions.)

A principal place of business includes a place of business that satisfies the following requirements: the office is used by the taxpayer to conduct administrative or management activities of the business; and there's no other fixed location of the business where the taxpayer conducts these activities. This could be a difficult requirement to meet. However, it may be possible to argue that the office isn't available for conducting business because of COVID. Time will tell.

The exclusive use requirement means that part of the home must be used solely for business purposes. The following example should clarify any questions on this subject.

Assume that John is a self-employed PR professional and makes an office in his home for business purposes. The office is also used by his wife to pay family bills and by their children to remote into their school classes and do homework assignments. Unfortunately, the exclusive use requirement isn't met, and no office in the home deduction will be allowed.

## How the deduction is determined

The office in home deduction can be determined in either of two ways: the regular method or the simplified method.

When using the regular method—actual expenses—expenses must be categorized as direct or indirect. Direct expenses benefit only the business part of the home and are deducted in full. Indirect expenses are for maintaining and operating the home such as utilities and insurance. Indirect expenses benefit both personal use as well as business use and allocations between the two are therefore necessary. This allocation is determined by the floor space involved, dividing the business area involved by the total area of the home.

## Home office expenses for self-employed

The allocation of the home office expenses can't exceed the gross income from the business less all business expenses. What this means is the home office deduction cannot create a loss. If it does, the loss can be carried forward to future years and used subject to the same limitations.

Employees can't benefit from the home office deduction because it's considered an itemized deduction which is no longer allowable. However, mortgage interest is deductible and taxes up to \$10,000 are also allowable if total itemized deductions exceed the standard deduction.

Finally, the home office deduction includes an allowable portion of cost recovery (depreciation) on the personal residence.

## Renters

A home office deduction is also available to those who rent rather than own. In this case, the business percentage is applied to the rent being paid and utilities if paid for.

## Simplified method

Because of the complexity of the regular method, the IRS established an optional simplified method for calculating the home office deduction. Taxpayers using this method are allowed a deduction of \$5 per square foot of space devoted to the office.

However, because no more than 300 square feet can be counted, the maximum deduction is limited to \$1,500.

Taxpayers can choose between the simplified method and regular method each year. However, once a choice is made for a year, it can't be changed.

## So, what should you choose?

Both methods require exclusive and regular use of the office.

The simplified method requires fewer calculations and less record keeping.

Because no depreciation is allowed, the simplified method will avoid the 25 percent tax on real estate gains when the home is sold.

With a maximum deduction of \$1,500, the simplified method, in most cases, will result in a smaller deduction than the regular method.

Under the simplified method the taxpayer isn't permitted to carry over unused deductions to the following year.

Once a choice is made for a year, the choice can't be changed.

Next month, I'll discuss the tax implications of having a principal or employee working from home in a state in which the PR firm never conducted business. I'll also discuss the home office deduction when a C or S corporation is involved. ○

## PR news brief

### Diversity Marketing Consortium expands ranks

The Diversity Marketing Consortium, which works to help offset systemic racial and gender-based inequity for underrepresented business founders, has brought on several new members.

Peppercomm, Clarity, Praytell and Racepoint Global have all signed on to support the organization, which was formed in July 2020 by SourceCode Communications, Cheer Partners, influencer agency Social Studies and Superbolt.

DMC is partnering with Harlem Capital, an early-stage venture capital firm focused on investing in minority and women founders in the United States, to provide \$3 million in pro bono marketing services over the course of two years.

Companies in the program, which include those in Harlem Capital's portfolio, will work with the DMC for a minimum of three months, after which another group of founders will participate in the program.

"We started the Diversity Marketing Consortium with our industry peers to work toward tangible and meaningful change," said Greg Mondschein, Founder of the Diversity Marketing Consortium and Managing Partner of SourceCode. "With these new partners, we'll be able to expand to serve more founders and we're excited to see what the future holds."

Startups that wish to apply for the program can do so by visiting the DMC's website.

## Health, PA firms post gains in COVID year

**T**he best recipe for success in the current PR market? Be a healthcare-oriented firm. That's the conclusion reached by a new survey from law firm Davis & Gilbert.

All of the healthcare PR firms that responded to the D&G survey reported that their profits were up this year, with 75 percent of them also registering an increase in revenue.

It's been a bullish year for public affairs PR firms as well, with 67 percent of them saying that both profits and revenue rose. And over half (56 percent) of integrated marketing firms said they saw up an uptick in profits and revenue.

Another lesson from the past year: Larger firms are better placed to withstand the effects of the public health, economic and social justice crises the PR market is confronting. A majority of firms with more than 50 employees recorded a rise in profits, while 55 percent of those with over 100 employees saw profits go up.

The numbers are not quite so rosy for the market as a whole, however, where only 37 percent of firms saw revenue rise for the first eight months of 2020, with 54 percent recording a revenue drop and nine percent saying that revenue was flat.

The impact of COVID-19 on the work environment will last well into next year, survey respondents said. Nearly every firm (98 percent) said that some component of their workforce will be working remotely for at least two days a week for the first quarter of 2021, with 61 percent saying they expect more than half of their workforce will be doing so.

Concern with diversity-related issues was also high across the board, especially with more financially successful firms. All of the firms that reported increased revenue also said they had committed to increase their proportion of people of color by between 16 and 25 percent over the next six months.

Overall, four out of five (80 percent) predict that their net revenue will rise in 2021, with only 14 percent expecting a drop.

The D&G study surveyed 87 respondents across North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia/New Zealand. ○

## Purdue Pharma turns page on opioid marketing scandal

**P**urdue Pharma and the Justice Dept. have ironed out a settlement to resolve multi-year civil and criminal investigations into the company's past opioid marketing practices.

Tim McDermott of the Drug Enforcement Administration said the resolution "closes a particularly sad chapter in the ongoing battle against opioid addiction."

As part of Purdue's plea, it will admit that from May 2007 through at least March 2017 the company conspired to defraud the US by impeding the lawful function of the DEA by representing



to the DEA that it maintained an effective anti-diversion program when, in fact, it "continued to market its opioid products to more than 100 healthcare providers whom the company had good reason to

believe were diverting opioids by reporting misleading information to the DEA to boost Purdue's manufacturing quotas," according to the Justice Dept.'s Oct. 21 statement.

Under a separate civil settlement with the Sackler family, the Sacklers—knowing that the legitimate market for opioids had contracted—told Purdue executives to recapture lost sales by ad-



proving a marketing program in 2013 called "Evolve to Excellence." That program had sales reps intensifying their push for OxyContin "to extreme high-volume prescribers who were already writing 25 times as many OxyContin scripts as their peers."

Steve Miller, who joined Purdue's board as Chairman in 2018, said the company "deeply regrets and accepts the responsibility for the misconduct detailed by the Dept. of Justice in the agreed statement of facts." ○

## Racepoint hauls in \$2.6M from Huawei USA

**R**acepoint Global received \$1.2 million from Huawei Technologies USA for handling social media work, arranging "virtual cocktails," doing press outreach and producing videos during the six months ended Sept. 30, according to its Justice Dept. filing.

That fell a bit short of the \$1.4 million that the Boston-based firm collected for the March 31-ended period from the US affiliate of the Chinese smartphone maker that has been sanctioned by the U.S. government.

The Trump administration cut off Huawei's access to the American-made advanced technology chips that it needs to build telecommunications networks because it views the company as a security threat. Huawei rejects that charge.

Huawei reported Oct. 23 that nine-month sales grew 10 percent to \$101 billion compared to a 24 percent jump for the 2019 period.

CNN reported the US sanctions make it harder for Huawei to compete with Apple and Samsung in the high-end smartphone market. ○

## Gingrich ex-press aide logs on at Internet Association

**T**he Internet Association has hired Christina Martin, who was Press Secretary for former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, as Senior VP-Communications and PA.

She will advocate on issues such as content moderation, data privacy, copyright, while overseeing outreach for the more than 40-member group that includes Facebook, Google, Amazon, Spotify, Airbnb, Microsoft, eBay and Lyft.

Most recently, Martin ran Rosehill Strategic and held Exec. VP jobs at Corn Refiners Assn, Renewable Fuels Assn and Weber Shandwick's Powell Tate shop; Senior VP-PA and Communications at CTIA—The Wireless Assn. and Press Secretary for ex-Iowa Governor Terry Branstad. ○



Christina Martin



## Hungary hires 'political warfare' consultant

The Government of Hungary has hired Strategic Improvisation Inc. to generate positive media coverage and combat negative press coverage of the Central European country.

David Reaboi, who calls himself a national security and political warfare consultant, heads SI, which he relocated last year from D.C. to Miami Beach. Politico dubbed him "a right-wing pugilist on Twitter," where he has more than 107,000 followers.

Reaboi took to the medium Oct. 19 to hit Joe Biden after he called Hungary and Poland totalitarian regimes. Reaboi tweeted: "Biden's attack on Hungary is utterly stupid. Here they are, diversifying their energy supply so they're less reliant on Russian energy. Europeans talk a lot about Putin, but line up to buy energy from him."

Hungary's right-wing leader, Viktor Orban, is a close ally of President Trump.

SI's agreement with Hungary's D.C. embassy calls for it to engage in management of the political media and to place op-eds.

The campaign runs through Dec. 20. SI receives a fee of \$70,000 for the effort. ○

## Rational picks up El Salvador

Rational PR has signed a PR contract worth \$65,000 per month to provide PR and communications support to El Salvador. The six-month pact calls for drafting press releases, talking points, social media statements and organizing events.

Rational CEO Patrick Dorton heads the El Salvador team that

FARA News



### NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT FILINGS

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

**Wiggin and Dana LLP**, New Haven, CT, **registered Oct. 14, 2020 for International Criminal Court**, The Hague, Netherlands, regarding the consequences of the Jun. 11, 2020 Executive Order on Blocking Property of Certain Persons Associated with the International Criminal Court as it relates to ICC officials Fatou Bensouda and Phakiso Mochochoko. Possible civil litigation in federal court may be initiated on their behalf.

**S-3 Group, LLC**, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 13, 2020 for Investment Corporation, LLC**, Baku, Azerbaijan, regarding creation and placement of earned and digital media to further diplomacy.

**Western Hemisphere Strategies, LLC**, Coral Gables, FL, **registered Oct. 15, 2020 for Administrative Ministry of the Presidency**, Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, regarding the interests of the country and its people.

**Media Planning International Corporation**, Miami, FL, **registered Oct. 8, 2020 for Promote Iceland**, Reyjavik, Iceland, regarding media planning and buying services in the U.S. to promote tourism.

Lobbying News



### NEW LOBBYING DISCLOSURE ACT FILINGS

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

**McDermott+Consulting LLC**, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 23, 2020 for The Partnership to Advance Virtual Care**, Washington, D.C., regarding issues relating to expanding access to telehealth services for Medicare beneficiaries.

**First Principles Strategies, LLC**, Centerville, VA, **registered Oct. 23, 2020 for Fidelis Government Relations** on behalf of Exela Pharma Services, Washington, D.C., regarding federal assistance for COVID-19 vaccination development and production.

**Government Relations Group, LLC**, Miami, FL, **registered Oct. 22, 2020 for DemeTECH Corporation**, Miami Lakes, FL, regarding manufacturing PPEs.

**Holly Strategies Inc.**, Arlington, VA, **registered Oct. 20, 2020 for WHOOP, Inc.**, Boston, MA, regarding the benefits of wearable fitness technology

**Weeks, Butera & Israel PLLC**, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 23, 2020 for Virgin Galactic Holdings, Inc.**, Washington, D.C., regarding spaceflight issues.

includes Andrew Homan (Director of Digital Media) and Nicolas Fitzgerald (Senior Director of PR).

In August, El Salvador hired and fired the Sonoran Policy Group, which had a \$450,000 contract. The Associated Press reported that El Salvador dropped SPG after the wire service requested a comment about the contract from the country's office of the President.

El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, a close ally of President Trump, faces criticism that his "popular policies mask an authoritarian streak," according to the AP. ○

## Morocco's OCP adds CCO Communications to PR lineup

Morocco's OCP North America unit has hired Minneapolis-based CCO Communications LLC for PR support on the petition by Florida's The Mosaic Company seeking countervailing duties on the import of phosphate fertilizers to the U.S.

Mosaic claims OCP's exports to the US are unfairly subsidized by Morocco, owner of 94 percent of the company, putting the future of its mines and production facilities and jobs of 3,500 workers in Florida and Louisiana at risk.

Launched in 2016 by General Mills CCO and VP-Global Communications Tom Forsythe, CCO joins FleishmanHillard and Cornerstone Government Affairs on OCP's communications team.

It will handle research, message development, media relations, stakeholder targeting/engagement and advocacy efforts.

CCO bills OCP an hourly \$300 rate for up 100 hours per month. It must receive prior approval for additional hours. ○

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### J Public Relations

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letstalk@jpublicrelations.com  
www.jpublicrelations.com

Employees: 65. Founded: 2005.

**Agency Statement:** J Public Relations (JPR) is an international luxury PR and social media agency specializing in hospitality, travel and luxury lifestyle brands with offices in New York City, London, Los Angeles and San Diego. JPR is a trusted leader in media relations and brand strategy, trend forecasting, brand partnerships, influencer relations, social media strategy and unparalleled media placements worldwide.

Established in 2005, the award-winning agency has consistently risen to become the country's fastest growing, bi-coastal agency in the travel and hospitality spaces. JPR's global roster includes more than 125 hotels in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Caribbean, Dubai, Europe, New Zealand, Asia and more. JPR steadily garners and retains notable clients including Relais & Châteaux, Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts, Vail Resorts Hospitality, Grace Hotels, InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown, Newport Beach & Company, Four Seasons Lanai and 15 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. The agency also garnered "Top Places to Work" by PR News and "Agency of the Year" by *Bulldog Reporter* in addition to multiple trade and consumer awards for company culture and brand success.

Jamie Sigler O'Grady, Sarah Evans, partners

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- ▶ **Anonymous resume bank** protects your confidential information. Your resume will be displayed for employers to view EXCEPT your identity and contact information, which will remain confidential until you are ready to reveal it.
- ▶ **Value-added benefits** of career coaching, resume services, education/training, articles and advice, resume critique, resume writing and career assessment test services.

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# Measuring clicks isn't enough to understand what clicks.

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Enhanced loyalty. Purchase intent. Real innovation.

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