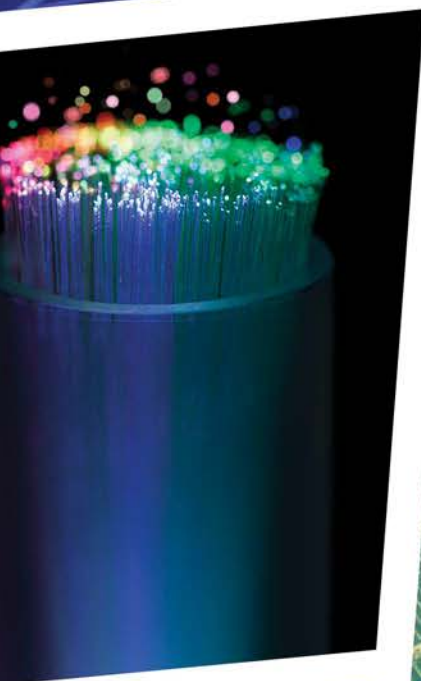


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THE TECHNOLOGY ISSUE

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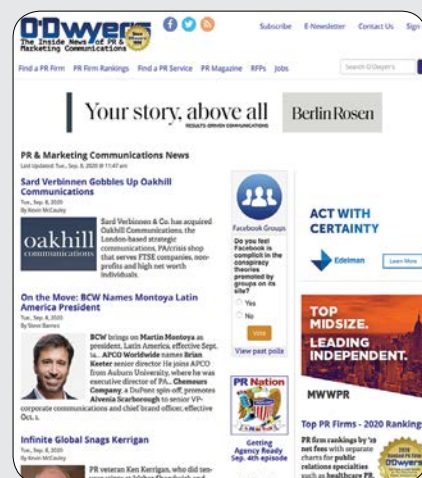
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Americans uninformed about U.S. election process

Just in time for the midterm elections. Most Americans know very little about how the U.S. election process works, and this lack of knowledge—coupled with a lack of basic media literacy and critical thinking skills—affects their decisions at the ballot box and their faith in the election process as well as what they think should be done about America’s misinformation crisis, according to a recent report by Paris-based critical thinking advocacy group The Reboot Foundation.

Reboot’s report suggests that Americans’ faith in our election system is highly vulnerable to manipulation. Despite social media companies’ recent pledges to tamp down on the conspiracy theories and misinformation that flow on their platforms, the spread of this content hasn’t stopped, and this is particularly true when it comes to election disinformation.

A *New York Times* investigation published in October details how hundreds of Republican candidates slated to appear on ballots in November have expressed doubt or deliberately spread misinformation surrounding the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, using the lie that the election was rigged as a cudgel for winning the ticket in their respective races.

Sadly, Reboot’s report revealed just how effective these lies can be.

The Reboot survey included a quiz regarding basic election and voting facts. Some questions included: “Is a citizen’s right to vote guaranteed by the Constitution?” “Do political ads have to be truthful?” and “Are elections for President and Congress overseen by the Federal government, which sets voting rules that all states must follow?”

The result? When it comes to elections, most Americans barely get a passing grade. The average score in Reboot’s quiz was 66 percent—or a test grade of a D. Only 14 percent of respondents earned a B grade or better.

Interestingly, the survey suggests that someone’s knowledge about how our elections work is linked to both their confidence in our electoral system as well as the opinion that more needs to be done to combat misinformation. While a third (32 percent) of the survey’s respondents said they’re not confident in the integrity of the U.S. electoral system, those who scored well on the election-fact quiz (a grade of B or better) were almost twice as likely to express confidence in the integrity of our elections and were also more likely to view election misinformation as a serious problem.

Perhaps most troubling: While the survey found that only 28 percent of respondents considered themselves “very confident” in their abilities to identify election misinformation, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents claimed to use their own critical thinking skills when assessing misinformation.

So, what sources do these “critical thinkers” rely on when verifying information? Unfortunately, the report discovered that many Americans turn to outlets that aren’t the best. While more than half (52 percent) claim they check the information that’s reported in the mainstream news, more than 40 percent said this “research” consists of podcasts, YouTubers, newsletters or websites not affiliated with mainstream news organizations. An additional 16 percent said they ask friends and family members, while 13 percent said they ask their connections on social media platforms. Nearly 12 percent admitted that they rarely try to determine the truth of the political information they encounter.

And, as it turns out, members of the self-described “critical thinkers” contingent were also more likely to lack confidence in the integrity of our elections than other respondents and also had a more difficult time determining the truth regarding the 2020 presidential election.

Finally, while more than two-thirds (67 percent) of the survey’s respondents overall agreed that social media platforms have a responsibility to fight election misinformation, self-described “critical thinkers” were 160 percent more likely to believe that social media companies don’t bear that responsibility.

The Reboot Foundation’s report, “Misinformed & Misled: Uncertainty, Mistrust and Disinformation Frustrate Voters,” was based on a survey of more than 350 U.S. adults in September. The survey was conducted using Amazon’s crowd-sourcing service Mechanical Turk. ○

— Jon Gingerich

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Social media could erode trust in the tech sector

Levels of trust in the global tech sector are slipping, according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer.

By Steve Barnes

While the general level of trust in the tech sector globally remains high, there are signs of it slipping, and at least one potential crack could put a major dent in its reputational armor—social media.

The latest Edelman Trust Barometer special report, “Trust and Technology,” found that out of the 12 sectors examined, technology came out on top, deemed trustworthy by more than three quarters (76 percent) of respondents.

However, most other sectors did rather well too. Food & beverage (74 percent), healthcare (73 percent) and manufacturing (73 percent) were all very close behind. In fact, out of the categories examined in the

study, only one did not have the approval of more than 60 percent of respondents. That one is social media, which recorded a trust rating of just 47 percent.

Social media’s low rating could turn out to be a big factor in the decline of the tech sector’s reputation as a whole. More than nine in 10 respondents (91 percent) said that they now think of social media and/or digital applications as being part of the tech sector. Although including digital apps and services as part of “tech” results in a 14 percent jump trust in the sector, adding social media accounts for a 4.3 percent drop.

When looked at on a country-by-country basis, the U.S. has a bigger challenge than many when it comes to trust in tech.

Over the past 10 years, the study says that the U.S. trust level has dropped 24 points, to 54 percent. And while such countries as Canada, the UK and Japan are experiencing similar difficulties, trust levels in countries including Indonesia (91 percent), China (90 percent) and India (89 percent) are on an upward swing.

As regards reasons for the slide in trust, almost three quarters of respondents overall (73 percent) say that they worry about their data privacy, with 71 percent adding that cybersecurity is also a concern. False information, fake news and “deepfakes” are also cited as big problems.

Nonetheless, respondents see a positive side to the tech industry’s innovations, indicating that they think technological innovations can solve societal challenges such as access to healthcare, economic competitiveness, jobs and information quality. ○

Tech companies step up customer engagement

By Steve Barnes

Tech companies are shifting their communications increasingly toward customer engagement and loyalty, according to a new study from Alloy.

The Alloy Technology Marketing Report surveyed more than 115 B2B tech professionals in sales and marketing positions in July and August of this year and found that addressing the full customer lifecycle was a top priority.

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of respondents said that they have accelerated their revenue goals from existing customers over the past 12 months, and that number rises to 86 percent for FinTechs and 94 percent for HealthIT companies. On the other side, 41 percent said that they were reducing their emphasis on net new sales.

This change may be at least partly due to changes in buyer behavior. One of those changes: B2B buyers are more willing to make large purchases online than they were in the past. In addition, the overall digital transformation of the market has made it necessary for tech brands to reposition themselves and enter new markets in order to stay competitive.

Those shifting boundaries have in effect reshaped the customer experience for many buyers in the tech sector, raising the importance of maintaining existing relationships and bolstering customer retention.

When it comes to what department is ultimately responsible for growing customer revenue, sales still comes out on top, cited by nearly half (49 percent) of respondents. But the power of customer success (21 percent) and customer experience (10 percent) is considerable, together accounting for almost a third of responses.

Ultimately, survey respondents agreed that the real key to revenue growth is collaboration. Nearly 70 percent said that their organization would be more successful if sales, RevOps, marketing, CX and customer success were more closely aligned. For vendors selling IT solution, that number rises to 95 percent. ○



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Conspiracy beliefs linked to lack of critical thinking

Faults in the U.S. educational system and a lack of basic critical thinking skills are to blame for the rise in conspiracy theories in American society today, according to a recent survey.

By Jon Gingerich

The popularity of conspiracy theories and the rise of misinformation online has birthed an environment of deep political division and polarization. According to a recent survey by The Reboot Foundation, these beliefs are correlated with a lack of critical thinking skills and basic scientific literacy, suggesting that education might be key to addressing this problem.

On the face of it, Reboot's survey revealed some troubling findings regarding how widely held conspiracy beliefs are among the American public. A quarter (25 percent) of the survey's participants admitted they were open to believing at least one blatant conspiracy theory. An additional 25 percent said it was either certainly true or probably true that "COVID-19 is a biological weapon released intentionally by China." 22 percent said it was certainly true or probably true that "the trails left in the sky by high-flying aircraft are actually toxic chemicals." More than one in five (21 percent) believe that "5G mobile Internet is substantially harmful

to human health," and 15 percent said that "climate change was a conspiracy by the left to hurt the economy" was either certainly or probably true.

The survey also revealed that many Americans get failing grades for basic scientific literacy: 15 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that "the sun travels around the Earth."

Most importantly, the survey's findings suggest that improved education and media literacy efforts—particularly in schools—can have a mitigating effect on combating conspiratorial thinking. Those who claimed to get most of their information from higher education, government sources, newspapers or magazines were 26 percent less likely to believe in conspiracy theories than those who said they get most of their information from TV or social media. They also tended to achieve scores on Reboot's science-literacy quiz that were, on average, about six percent higher.

Unfortunately, only 42 percent of respon-

dents reported learning about analyzing science news in high school, and only 38 percent said they were taught about media messaging.

Conspiracy theorists tend to lean politically conservative. Among the survey's respondents, those who identified as conservatives were 65 percent more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than self-identified centrists and were 70 percent more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than those who described themselves as progressive.

The survey also uncovered conspiracy theories' potential role in fueling political division in the country. Only 28 percent of respondents said they engage with people who hold opposing views. An additional 30 percent in this year's survey also said they rarely or never "seek out people who tend to have different opinions than me to engage in discussion or debate."

Incredibly, 93 percent said they believe that critical thinking skills are important in today's world. ○

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Promoting early-stage tech without getting burned

The rise of the Metaverse offers important lessons on updating PR strategies for far-off solutions.

By Bob Geller

It's been only a year since Mark Zuckerberg announced Facebook's rebranding to Meta and his vision for how the company will lead us into an immersive, virtual world. Yet there's been a lot of excitement and press coverage in this time—not all of it glowing—for something that research firm Gartner Group claims is 10 years from mainstream adoption.

How do you promote something so intangible, so nascent, and avoid getting hurt by the backlash?

How soon is now?

The Metaverse isn't a new concept; it's about 30 years old. The term originated in Neal Stephenson's 1992 science-fiction novel, *Snow Crash*. But I'm not sure how seriously people took the Metaverse before Facebook's grand pivot, which was announced on October 28, 2021, when Mark Zuckerberg laid out the vision in a keynote at the Oculus Connect show.

Some say the move was about Facebook's effort to recapture leadership on the heels of lots of bad press, stagnant numbers and the flocking of a newer generation to other platforms like TikTok. The more cynical might smell a "wag the dog" motive.

Regardless, it's striking how the words of an aging tech giant can light a fire under a concept that was little known and seemingly not going anywhere at the time.

You can get an idea of just how important this event was in the rise of the Metaverse by looking at press mentions of the term over the past year compared with the previous year. There's also been a huge spike in startups entering and growing in this space recently, as evidenced by VC investment. A post on McKinsey & Co.'s blog reported an aggregate of \$120 billion in funding for related technology and infrastructure in the first five months of 2022, more than double the \$57 billion invested in all of 2021.

It would be wrong to blame all the hype and the exuberance on the media and VCs. There are many players in the hype-industrial complex. Look in your mirrors and at your employers and clients. Consider the countless PowerPoints, business plans, companies and new divisions launched in just one year to chase the Metaverse dream, involving all kinds of hardware, software and use cases (think real estate, avatars, ecommerce, advertising, entertainment ... the list is endless).

But you have a job to do. You've been

handed an assignment to go out there and make it rain media for some Metaverse-related offering.

Or perhaps you're working in other early-stage areas that hold much promise, like quantum computing, Web3 or the blockchain.

How is PR for such far-off possibilities different?

A look at technology evolution

To better understand this, it can help to consider categories. Each has a narrative, a story arc that starts with invention and ends with obsolescence. It has its innovators, leaders and followers and is about promise, expectations, triumph and sometimes flameouts.

How long it takes for a category to emerge and go big relates to many factors. Geoffrey Moore wrote about the dynamics of technology adoption in his classic text, *Crossing the Chasm* (the "chasm" refers to the gap separating innovation and mass adoption).

For example, consider desktop PCs. They were big a million years ago—and they're still important—but does anyone really think about them or care much today? The media especially doesn't want to cover legacy tech. On the other hand, most would agree that quantum computing—a segment our agency works in—is at an early stage, perhaps five or 10 years away from mainstream adoption. There's much reporting and vendor jockeying in this sector, nonetheless.

Media appetite and coverage of vendor news and stories vary significantly depending on the stage of the space. It's great to be on the leading edge of a trend as it's gaining steam (i.e., somewhere between the Technology Trigger and Peak of Inflated Expectations).

But sometimes the hype gets ahead of marketplace adoption. I've worked in tech for 35 years, yet I've never seen the exuberance go from zero to 60 so quickly as the din around the Metaverse (and related areas, like Web3).

The Ghost Howls blog wrote about the Metaverse's Technology Trigger perch on Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies 2022: "saying that 'Metaverse' is just rising now on the hype sounds a bit weird, considering that ... the web has been filled with posts about the Metaverse and all the trillions it may give us."

Tips for promoting early-stage tech

So, what are the right tech PR and marketing tactics for early-stage tech, when case studies and practical solutions are years away? The specifics will vary, and I could fill another article on this, but here are some quick tips:

- Companies at the top—the inventors or largest proponents like Meta—should solidify and retain their position. This means seeking to become synonymous with the category, waving its banner through education, shaping standards and influencing industry analysts' reports on the space.

- If you're coming in after, take heart; leadership can change (recall the saying, the pioneers are the one who have arrows in their backs). Follow in the leader's draft. They're doing the heavy lifting of educating the masses and establishing the space. The jobs of PR and marketing are to emphasize differentiators and explain how your technology advances the space.

- There can be a lot of noise. It's a "hurry up and wait" game, and the press are eager to jump on every advancement. You need to choose your shots wisely and decide whether to play the hype game or be more conservative (but there are no awards for playing it low-key).

- There's little in the way of validation, and the kinds of stories the media will cover are different from stories for later-stage tech. In lieu of customers and case studies, news about breakthroughs in the lab, key partnerships and trials can fly.

- New shows, awards, publications and influencers emerge—the savvy PR team finds the right opportunities and aligns with the right forums and influencers.

- The press can get skeptical and even negative. If you're a company that competes in the space, be ready for this. Have answers for the most likely concerns.

Working in PR for early-stage tech can be exciting. There are also some unique challenges. Meta provides an interesting example of the hype in a space exploding in record time, so it's a bit unusual. If you're working in the Metaverse-related areas or other nascent spaces, I hope these tips are helpful.

Bob Geller is President of Fusion PR. He regularly shares his insights on the blog *Flackrevenge.com* and on the podcast *PR, Done & Doner*. ◉



Bob Geller



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What technology accomplishes is up to us

Technology empowers us and has transformed our lives. But how we use it gives rise to new responsibilities.

By Cortney Stapleton, Janine Savarese and Bob Pearson

Technology makes our dreams come alive. It allows us to remove barriers in our brains and imagine how a solution might come about. It leads us to think of a world without a need for passwords.

It makes us wonder why all our health-care information can't be available to us in a personalized cloud ... today.

It inspires us to think of how technology can democratize who can access it and build a successful business, often with far less cash than needed in the past. It helps us learn from friends anywhere in the world.

Technology is inspiring, and it's why we're focused on building a technology practice that empowers entrepreneurs to achieve their dreams through the use of technology.

We realize that transformational changes in society require us to keep up with their progress. In our world, it means that we are always learning how technologies work, such as blockchain, or taking the time to understand how an entire field, like artificial intelligence, can be used in myriad ways.

We also realize that any technology, in the wrong hands, can cause trouble, leading to an increase in cybercrime, ransomware, counterfeiting and countless new ways to steal, misinform and wreak havoc.

Our team has a responsibility to provide an offering that promotes new technologies and protects us from their use by bad actors.

We live in a fascinating time. A time where an app we never heard of became the fastest growing app in history and is now the most visited site in the world. We know it as TikTok.

A time where Goldman Sachs now has 12,000 engineers, or one of every four employees.

The list of amazing technology-related advances and investments can go on forever, it seems, but that's actually not what gets us the most excited.

Our team loves speaking with entrepreneurs who share their vision for the future and ask us to be part of the solution to ensure their audience knows and understands what is possible.

We know that money fuels technology advance, which is why we are focused on partnering with companies in their journey from an idea through numerous funding rounds to an IPO and beyond.

Being in technology for decades, we realize that a technology advance doesn't mean anyone automatically cares. Every advance requires a narrative that does it justice in explaining how the technology works and why it's valuable.

Technology unlocks us and we unlock it.

What's equally fascinating about technology is how it evolves how we work in incremental steps that may initially sound mundane but are arguably revolutionary.

Understanding the history of how technology evolves informs the present. Dale Laszig, who writes the Street Smarts column for Green Sheet, said it best when she recently reflected on how "the password-less journey in payments requires the same guiding principles that informed early hardware designs."

Understanding the economic cycles that impact technology's advance is also critical, particularly related to valuation. Gregory Bedrosian, Managing Partner and CEO of Drake Star Partners said, "Before the downturn, people were asking me to be introduced to technology companies that were changing the world. Today, they are asking to be introduced to companies that are EBIDTA positive."

A change in how we value companies also deserves a change in how we tell their story.

Our media models are designed to reach the right people within the 5.5 billion people who are online today. Our job is to make

it simple to reach our core audience in a world where we have seven billion Google searches a day and view videos 6.5 billion times daily. The world may be increasingly complex, which is why our analytics-driven media models must be increasingly clear and scalable.

And about those billions of people, we never forget that we have an obligation to utilize technology in a manner that is responsible and, when possible, addresses societal problems in new ways.

Our team has expertise in how to combat misinformation and disinformation, so that we can diminish or even avoid its impact. We believe that building a reputation in today's society requires equal skill in defending it via the most recent uses of technology, including expertise in the deep and dark web.

We live in a world that's battling issues, ranging from climate change to malnutrition. It's why we're going big in building a purpose-driven offering that can help leaders imagine how their technology can drive revenue for shareholders and opportunities for citizens of our world.

Technology will always transform society as we know it.

What matters is how we apply it to make a difference.

It's why we wake up every morning imagining how our clients will contribute to improving our world. Our vehicle to help them includes media relations, brand positioning and all the things you would expect across communications, public affairs and marketing.

When our day ends, we ask ourselves if we're making a difference through our support of some of the smartest technology entrepreneurs in the world.

It's a question that will never end and never gets old.

Cortney Stapleton is Managing Partner at The Bliss Group. Janine Savarese is CEO of NextTech Communications. Bob Pearson is CEO of The Bliss Group. ○



Cortney Stapleton



Janine Savarese



Bob Pearson

PR news brief

Consilium Strategic Comms. eyes Oculis deal

Consilium Strategic Communications is handling the merger of Oculis and European Biotech Acquisition Corp. in a SPAC deal valued in the \$220 million range. The combined entity will trade on the NASDAQ.

Switzerland-based Oculis is a biopharma company focused on developing treatments to save sight and improve eye care. Riad Sherif, Oculis CEO, said proceeds from the EBAC transaction will be used to accelerate development of drugs in its pipeline. EBAC has screened over 100 European biotech companies. CEO Eduardo Bravo called Oculis a prime example of what his company wants to invest in.

He said Oculis has "great innovation, a well thought-out strategy and an experienced management team to bring promising therapies to market for patients suffering from eye disease."

Oculis has product candidates to treat macular edema, dry eye disease and nero-retina indicators such as glaucoma.



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We are all tech PR practitioners

Technology is such a pervasive part of our daily lives that we're now all tech experts to a certain degree—placing the onus on tech PR practitioners to constantly remain one step ahead in order to succeed.

By Henry Feintuch

Moore's Law is the observation that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit double about every two years. While chip makers debate whether Moore's Law is approaching its limit, I'd argue that the mindshare of a tech PR practitioner has to double at least once a year.

Let me back up.

When I first started in PR, the technology we used consisted of:

- Desktop computers with MultiMate Advantage or WordPerfect software for word processing.
- Fax machines (to send press releases).
- Yearly subscriptions to Bacon's for media contact information.
- An account coordinator to count client clips.
- Desktop calendars and planners.

Compare this to today's office essentials:

- Microsoft Office/Google Docs, plus email, plus laptops and phones. Mobile technology allows us to work anywhere we want to. And I mean anywhere. A hammock on a beach? As long as you have solid Internet, you're good.

- Social media channels to help us disseminate information, in addition to one of several media contact databases

- Software that helps us communicate with teammates and clients, organize our day, keep time and get paid.

You get the picture. Our clients have changed as well, of course. Twenty years ago, tech PR meant TVs, audio products and other consumer electronics devices. A decade ago, the iPhone put a PC, music player, TV, game player and navigation device in our pocket.

Now the smart home is bringing home control—once only available to the rich and famous in a pricey, custom-programmed system—to the mainstream. We can buy smart lights, plugs, appliances, thermostats, video doorbells and leak detectors to make our homes more convenient, efficient and secure. Want to know who's at the front door while watching the game? Click a window on your TV to connect to the front door camera.

Take it to the next level, and vacation-mode scenes give your home a lived-in look and sound when you're away. Geofenced routines put your house in receiving mode when your car nears home: lights go on,

the garage door opens, music plays and the thermostat sets to the desired temperature. Go all out and get a heated driveway, and you'll never shovel snow again.

Early on, tech PR was a (mildly) exotic specialty requiring shops to pick a niche. Today, technology plays a role in every part of our lives, so no matter who your client is, you're likely a tech PR specialist, even if you never thought about it in that light before.

In 2022, tech PR means everything from Big Data to AI to Web3. Because our lives revolve around technology, the tech PR practitioner has to be an informed generalist in order to succeed.

No PR is simple; it's just that tech grows in leaps and bounds. Long-haul flights now take passengers through a series of programmed lighting presets designed to lull them to sleep and deliver them to their destinations refreshed and recharged instead of jet-lagged. Our watches do everything from enabling a chat to logging steps to taking an EKG. It can even connect you to emergency services if you're in a serious car accident.

One short poll at the Feintuch Communications office yields a primer in everyday tech:

"My water bottle uses UV-C wavelength from an LED located in the cap to clean my water and the bottle itself."

"I get my glasses online—I pick them out, send in my prescription and they get shipped directly to me."

"My groceries, dinner, music, alcohol, clothes and pet food all get delivered through an app."

"Even though dinner sometimes gets delivered by an app, I still love to cook—with my pressure cooker, my air fryer, my sous vide device or my chef's torch, which I can monitor via app on my phone."

We also track our tech-savvy contacts to learn from their next-gen adventures: "A friend bought a car from a vending machine and had it delivered to his home."

And on a personal level, I choose which TV programming to watch, at the time I want to watch. Remember "must-see TV" that kept you chained to the couch on Thursday nights? Now, when one of my colleagues mentions a must-see show she just finished binging, I go home that night, turn on Roku and start streaming the pilot on my big-screen TV while waiting for DoorDash to deliver my wings.

Years ago, when I mentioned that I had tech clients, I was expected to program VCRs or help set up computers for friends and family members. Now, I'm asked about everything from what kind of VPN to get to which type of bitcoin I think is most stable. I may not be an expert on either of those topics, but I have several colleagues who are. The next big thing in tech is always on our radar.

Two current Feintuch clients are using financial technology to support underfunded educational institutions.

ClassWallet helps get funding to teachers and schools and then helps them track it so they don't have to waste time on paperwork and receipts. The company puts needed supplies directly into the hands of students across the country. And Surge-Pays helps disadvantaged students by making Internet access and tablets available via the Affordable Connectivity Program. More than just nice to have, these types of technology are essential tools for students in the digital age.

Tech PR used to be a vertical; now it's table stakes. Scan the list of companies exhibiting at CES in Las Vegas every January and it's evident how far technology's reach extends. The metaverse, Web3, virtual and augmented reality will be in the spotlight as cutting-edge tech at CES 2023, while connected cars, connected health and sustainability will continue to be key themes for the future. What business could tractor company John Deere have at a tech event? Using tech to help feed a growing global population.

Here's one advance I don't appreciate as much as others: AI can write your blog posts for you. This one has the potential to do some harm to the PR industry if it makes your clients' messaging generic. The technology simply isn't there yet. If you're in the SEO business, AI-written posts can help you, but they'll be an instant turn-off to human eyes and brains, at least until the technology advances. Which it will, soon. Gulp.

Henry Feintuch is President tech PR firm Feintuch Communications. ○



Henry Feintuch

The importance of contributed content in tech PR

Contributed content is often the most effective venue for tech PR pros who want to raise awareness of their client's brand and communicate their best and most important ideas. But not all contributed content is created equally.

By Curtis Sparrer

Contributed content plays a very important role in the world of tech PR.

Written by non-journalist authors, "contributed content" is developed to provide media outlets and their readers with fresh content, new ideas, opinions and perspectives. These pieces help articulate a unique point of view and represent a key element of the PESO—paid, earned, shared and owned—content model that helps drive company and brand awareness.

Contributed content can take a number of forms, but there are some discrete differences between the types of material you can contribute, and they're worth clarifying:

- **A bylined article** explicitly provides the name of the author, for attribution. Obviously, bylines aren't anonymous, and they represent the views of the specific author. They can be prescriptive, exploring a problem and its potential solution, or they can be built around a specific opinion and written to advance the author's side of an issue.

- **An op-ed** comes from the world of newspapers, where opinions were literally laid out "opposite of the editorial" page. Op-eds are perspectives from individuals or organizations—like trade associations—that aren't affiliated with a publication's editorial board. They might rebut or support a piece published by the editorial board and relevant examples can be found in national and local papers every day.

For PR purposes, most of these articles are ghostwritten, which simply means that the actual work of writing the article is done by a communications professional.

Why we do it

If you're wondering why we pursue contributed content opportunities as PR people, ask yourself this question: Who in this economy doesn't need some additional thought leadership positioning and executive visibility?

Placing contributed content helps organizations and individual executives gain visibility and can be key elements in advocacy campaigns around specific issues, such as legislative and political conditions that might impact a company, industry or society.

Placing contributed content is an important tactic when it comes to getting an organization's vision "out there" in the marketplace of ideas, and it's very useful as a method of speaking to customers, prospects and partners while staking out a thought

leadership position. It's also effective because it illustrates the views and vision of top management, helping to build credibility and close deals by allowing potential customers and partners to vet your company. Once published, contributed content can also serve as useful sales support and collateral material, giving sales teams an opportunity to follow up with prospects by sharing the article.

What's more, contributed content serves as a data point, showing that your company is speaking with the most important media outlets about specific technologies and/or issues. Contributed content also helps drive new ideas, serving to build interest across the media about certain topics. Editors are always monitoring what their competitors publish, so an op-ed or a byline can easily initiate a news cycle.

Contributed content also creates a virtuous circle. As much as editors might not want to admit it—and perhaps might even cultivate the idea that they have an extensive staff, cranking out their own journalism in a nonstop fashion—publications need content. The editorial product that supports advertising isn't cheap or easy to develop, so sourcing quality content and viewpoints from the PR community makes sense.

Publishing a wide range of opinions, as well as providing executives and thought leaders with a platform to discuss the issues of the day, helps publications to serve all of their readership. Further, it allows media outlets to cast a wider net when it comes to advertising and growing circulation and online visibility.

Contributed content and tech PR

Contributed content is especially impactful in tech PR. As with other businesses and industries, it allows control of the messaging and narrative through your published pieces. It also facilitates the communication of complex technical topics and assists in the introduction of new concepts and technologies. As a case in point, my team has written numerous articles on major technological trends like AI and machine learning, agile development and blockchain. And we're currently introducing emerging concepts with each new article we write.

Publishing contributed content is also especially helpful for startups that have little or no brand recognition because it not only functions as publicity, but it also serves as a way to reach influencers. Leveraging con-

tributed content can position your company as a thought leader while helping to seed the market and thereby quietly nurturing sales efforts.

The executive challenge: time to write

By far the biggest challenge when it comes to contributed content is the fact that most executives simply don't have the time to write their own articles. While they may be subject matter experts, writing to the standards of a given publication is best done by a communications pro. This is because as "hired guns," professional writers can effectively articulate complex ideas and simultaneously work under the deadlines and other constraints that publications operate under.

Working with a third-party organization that offers ghostwriting services is the perfect solution. Agencies and authors-for-hire do most of the work, and the pieces written by content professionals are far more likely to be accepted and published.

In the end

Bylines and op-eds enable control of the message while empowering companies to speak to key audiences in the most direct and unfiltered way possible. For tech PR pros who want to help clients communicate their best and most important ideas, there's very little that is more effective than contributed content.

Curtis Sparrer is Co-Founder and Principal at Bospar. ○



Curtis Sparrer

PR news brief

FGS Global manages Thoma Bravo deal

FGS Global represents private equity firm Thoma Bravo as it agrees to buy ForgeRock digital identity platform for \$2.3 billion.

The all-cash \$23.25 per share offer is a 53 percent premium over ForgeRock's Oct. 10 closing stock price.

Chip Virnig, Thoma Bravo partner, said identity-centric cybersecurity solutions are critical enablers for businesses to transform their operations and ForgeRock has the tools that "combine both the advanced security and customer usability needed in the market."

ForgeRock posted \$48 million in revenues and a \$22 million loss for the June 30-ended quarter.

Recession-proofing your 2023 marketing and PR efforts

Why slashing your marketing budget during uncertain economic times can do more harm than good.

By Tahir Jones

Is your business prepared for the next recession? Even if you can't predict when it will happen, you can take steps to insulate your company from the fallout.

The current economic conditions make it critical for businesses to maximize the efficacy of their budgets. And as companies feel the pinch of the looming recession, marketing and PR budgets are often the first to be cut.

However, scaled-back marketing efforts can do more harm than good in a recession. Companies that maintain or increase their marketing spend during downtimes often see significantly higher growth rates in the short run and even when the economy rebounds. So, while some companies are pulling back on their spending, many resourceful marketers are finding innovative ways to keep their PR and digital marketing activities afloat.

Making some essential adjustments can safeguard your brand and maintain visibility during economic uncertainty. Here are several tips that will help you stay ahead of the curve, no matter what happens in the future.

Keep your message clear and focused

In times of economic uncertainty, keeping your message clear and focused is more important than ever. Chances are, you know your target audience and what they want. However, needs, perceptions and processes have changed dramatically over the last two years. Using outdated target market data will make it harder for prospects to understand what you do or how you can help them. So, take the time to define your target audience, craft a message that resonates with them now and convince them that you have the answers to their critical questions.

Focus on the data that matters

If you're in the business of marketing or public relations, then you know that data is everything. The correct data can help you make better decisions, craft more effective strategies and ultimately grow your business. But with so much data out there, it can be challenging to know where to focus your attention. It can be tempting for companies to track every metric under the sun to garner insights that will give them a competitive edge. However, there are a few critical metrics for marketing and PR in a down economy: reach, leads created and conversions.

Regarding reach, consider both the quantity and quality of the impressions you're

making. For example, having your ad appear on a high-traffic website is great, but if your target customer isn't visiting that site, your ad isn't doing much to help you achieve your business goals.

Another essential metric to track is the number of leads generated. This metric tells you how effectively your marketing and PR efforts generate interest in your product or service. You need to reevaluate your strategy if you're not generating enough leads.

Conversions are the measure of how successful your marketing or PR efforts are in terms of achieving tangible business results. Typically, conversions are measured in online sales or sign-ups, but they can also be offline sales, CTA clicks or phone calls. Whatever metric you use to track conversions, ensure that it ties directly to your business goals.

Keep your team lean and mean

One way to cut costs during a recession is by keeping your marketing and PR team lean and mean—that is, focused on essential functions and trimmed of any unnecessary fat. This doesn't mean letting go of good people. Instead, it means ensuring everyone on your team focuses on tasks that directly contribute to your bottom line. For example, your social media expert should focus on tasks like creating engaging content that delivers recession-sensitive messaging or running ads that generate leads. Focusing on "softer" goals such as thought leadership or "likes" doesn't deliver prospects into the funnel.

Automate your marketing

Marketing automation software enables companies to automate repetitive tasks, freeing up time and resources that can be better used elsewhere. For example, social media posts can be scheduled in advance, drip campaigns can be run automatically and automated follow-up emails can help move prospects through the sales funnel. Marketing automation saves time and money but it also allows companies to be more strategic and data-driven in their marketing efforts.

There are a wide variety of marketing automation platforms on the market, each with its unique features and capabilities. However, all good marketing automation platforms share some commonalities: they should be user-friendly, offer robust reporting capabilities and integrate with other business software such as customer relationship management systems.

At Karbo Communications, we use Sendinblue, which has powerful features like automation workflows, segmentation and personalization and a user-friendly interface that doesn't require you to be a tech expert to use.

Increase your focus on earned media

Advertisers tend to pull back on spending during economic downturns, leading to reduced paid media placements. Earned media placements are more resilient in a recession so focus on media coverage. Work with a reputable agency to develop relationships with journalists, identify newsworthy trends and create high-quality content to stand out from the competition.

Double down on content marketing

Unlike traditional advertising, which is often interruptive and sales-focused, content marketing provides value first and foremost. Because of this, it can be an extremely effective way to build trust with potential customers, especially during a recession. Invest in high-quality blog posts, infographics, eBooks, podcasts, videos and other types of content that will help you attract attention and build relationships with potential customers. Remember that people are looking for valuable, actionable information during a recession to help them make informed decisions—not sales pitches masquerading as content.

Invest in long-term relationships

Deepen relationships with your customers, clients and partners. The customers who already know and trust you are your lifeblood in an economic downturn. Spend more time nurturing these relationships instead of chasing short-term gains, and you'll be better positioned to weather any economic storm. Don't be too transactional. During recessions, people look for stability and security—not quick transactions.

Be sure to keep customers updated on any changes in policies or procedures, new products or services or anything else that might affect them. They'll appreciate your transparency and will be more likely to stick with you through thick and thin.

Check-in regularly (but not too often). It's important to stay in touch with your customers, but you don't want to come across as needy or clingy. Strike a balance by checking in every few weeks or so. A quick



Tahir Jones

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When high-impact, rapid-result programs take priority

With economic unknowns ahead, quick-turn, high-value results matter now more than ever.

By Danielle Engholm

If there were any personal takeaways from the last two years, it's that we're not in control of the future as much as we like to think we are. And, from the looks of things right now, much remains unknown for the year ahead, particularly as we look at the state of the economy and what it will mean for business.

We're seeing many companies get in front of this in ways that are shaping how we work a bit differently than in the past. Many are looking to step up their marketing and communications efforts by bringing on an agency for the first time (nothing new, right?). The difference? They're needing to show results on short-term projects before securing bigger budgets for longer-term programs.

How do you prioritize and where do you get started when the "to-do list" is long, but you need to show measurable results quickly? With every challenge comes an opportunity. Working with laser focus can yield amazing results. While there's not a one-size-fits-all approach, there are things you can do to help ensure success. Here are five must-dos to deliver a program that can drive more immediate results.

Make sure you know what you need to measure. Set clear objectives that align with what you're trying to do. If the budget is tight, know what's going to matter most to your leadership team to demonstrate success. Clear, measurable objectives that tie directly to your goals are critical. Do you need existing customers to upgrade to your

latest platform? Do you need leads in a new market? If you can outline what success will look like, you'll put your agency partners in a better position to help you get there.

Lean on your agency to recommend a strategy. If a successful short-term project is going to determine your management team's appetite for approving a bigger, longer-term marketing budget, let your agency help you shape the best strategy. This is also where the budget conversation needs to happen. Be clear on your objectives and budget and lean on your agency for recommendations on what is going to be the most effective plan. Securing media briefings may not be as successful in helping you achieve immediate KPIs as an ABM program. Let your agency advise on the best approach based on your goals with the time and budget available.

Be clear on who you're targeting. Many companies define their target audience too broadly when they have a very specific KPI they need to reach. Bring it back to your objectives and what audiences you need to reach to help you achieve your goals. Whether you move forward with a paid campaign, an earned media program or another communications channel strategy, there may be an opportunity to focus your target audience even more—particularly when budgets and timelines need to be managed closely.

Address the barrier. Talk through what's getting in the way of your audience taking the desired action. Does your sales channel

have a complicated narrative that hides the value of your solution? Do prospective customers not understand how your offering is different than the alternative, lower-cost solution? Are you not reaching your audience through the right channels? Knowing what obstacles are in the way can help ensure that you're implementing the right strategy.

Allocate budgets for meaningful measurement. When budgets are tight, you don't want to spend more money on program measurement than on program execution itself. At the same time, you need to capture and deliver meaningful metrics for your leadership team to demonstrate the value of the program. If you're working with an agency, make sure to leave room in the budget for measurement reports because often, this is the first cut.

Lastly, don't wait until the program ends to share results with leadership. Provide "right-sized" updates throughout the campaign, so they can see progress against goals, anticipated results and value to the business.

Danielle Engholm is a Senior Vice President in Padilla's Technology Practice focusing on integrated B2B marketing, PR and digital communications across industrial, heavy equipment, health, food and enterprise technology. ○



Danielle Engholm

RECESSION-PROOFING PR EFFORTS

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phone call or email just to touch base will let them know that you're thinking of them without being overbearing.

Incentives are always a great way to show your appreciation for your client's business. Whether it's a discount on their next purchase or early access to new products or services, they'll be happy to know that you value their business enough to give them special treatment. Just be sure not to go overboard—you don't want to devalue your own products or services.

Say "thank you" (and mean it). A simple "thank you" can go a long way toward solidifying your relationship with a client. Be sincere in gratitude and express why you're

thankful for their business. A genuine thank-you is always appreciated.

Get involved in your community

Another great way to recession-proof your marketing and PR efforts is to get involved in your community. Do this by sponsoring local events, donating to charities or simply being active on social media and engaging with potential customers from your area. When people see that you're invested in authentically helping during hard times and making your community a better place, they'll be more likely to do business with you. Today's purchase decision-makers often choose vendors based on their authentic, cause-based work.

Keep your eye on the prize

That means focusing on long-term growth instead of short-term gains. Yes, it's essen-

tial to tighten your budget during tough economic times, but don't let cost-cutting become an end in itself. Instead, focus on investments that will pay off down the road—in good times and bad.

A recession can be a tough time for businesses—but it doesn't have to spell disaster for your marketing or PR efforts. In fact, as your competitors are becoming more reluctant to move and are quiet, you have an opportunity to increase visibility and grow. By automating your marketing, investing in long-term relationships, focusing on quality over quantity and keeping your eye on the prize, you can weather economic storms that come your way.

Tauhir Jones is Head of Content and Digital Marketing and runs Karbo Communications' Content Studio. ○

New tech requires education before evangelization

How to inform and educate the media about technology clients that are breaking ground with new innovations.

By Alex Varney

For a growing tech company, the path to publicity may seem obvious. You've gotten the funding, have a working product, secured your first customer, hired an industry veteran and signed a major partnership agreement. The next step is a full-court media press, right?

Not necessarily. That plan assumes the media understands the significance of your product or service and also assumes there are reporters out there paying attention. This isn't a concern for legacy products and services where there's an existing media infrastructure and general awareness of the landscape. But with so much growth in tech-infused everything—fintech, proptech, insurtech, agtech, edtech, legaltech, martech and more—you need to do some work before you can expect the media to write about you.

Reporters are busier than ever and have increasingly wider areas of focus, but they still have a responsibility to their readers to create content that's on brand and in line with expectations. If there are no journalists focusing on your space, you need to first help reporters and editors understand why they should pay attention so they lean in when you send them the news you're hoping to promote.

For tech companies breaking new ground, there's often a period early on when editors may be reluctant to assign a reporter to explore your "cool new thing," simply because there's no analog out there in the market. This changes PR's job from pushing the bells and whistles of your product to first educating media on the broader category and the basic technology, as well as the challenge or pain point your technology is solving. This can be a heavy lift, but without it, your program won't even get off the ground, much less achieve the type of results that help drive business growth. Here are a few components of an effective media education program.

Simplify and clarify

The technology world is always coining new terms and phrases to categorize emerging ideas, solutions and models that are often understood by few outside their immediate circle. Instead of relying on the buzzwords that sales and marketing teams have come up with, take a step back and think about how you can use real-world language to explain what's new and different and why a consumer or end-user would

care. It's often helpful to consider how you might explain the technology to your parents or grandparents. This can help you quickly shed unnecessary jargon from your marketing, get to the heart of the "why" of your technology and generate real understanding.

Give media the tools they need

For complex technologies, verbal descriptions can be less than ideal. Think instead about how you can use various forms of rich media—such as a compelling chart, an infographic, a video or an animation—to bring your technology to life and quickly communicate the significance of an abstract concept or innovation. In conjunction with visual collateral, analogies, comparisons or simple use cases can be extremely effective in convincing a reporter your technology is worth attention.

Even once interest is piqued, additional collateral may be required before reporters "get it" and feel comfortable enough to write something. E-book overviews, glossaries of relevant terms, a comprehensive FAQ and relevant data that gives a sense of the market for your product or service can all contribute to create a compelling package that educates reporters before anything is formally pitched.

The importance of face time

Alongside collateral, in-person demos can be critical to effective education on technology functionality and provide an opportunity for reporters to engage in a deeper dialogue on your innovation than is possible on a phone or video call. Real-time walkthroughs and face-to-face conversations can also help kick-start relationship building. Better yet, if you can offer a reporter a sandbox version of the product, you can build credibility and let them experience the "Aha!" moment in an organic way.

Socialize your messaging

One big advantage tech firms have today is the ability to leverage social media. Social platforms can be a great way to test messaging outside of the spotlight, getting direct feedback from a diverse community with varying knowledge levels. It can also be the perfect venue for low-risk media interactions as the build knowledge of your product or offering. The less formal setting is conducive to collaborative dialogue as reporters explore the possibilities of your new technology.

Education begins at home

Educating media about your client goes hand in hand with educating your client about the media. Technology that might excite an executive or a product development team may not always translate into a compelling news story. A good PR team should push back when they're fed a sales pitch that doesn't pass the smell test, when superlatives such as "revolutionary" or "game-changing" are thrown around or when an analogy cherished by the founder doesn't hold up to scrutiny. The more companies can prove the value of their technology through customer testimonials, statistics, estimated time saved or other metrics, the more convincing the story will be. Getting sales and technology teams to understand what media need and how they think is a big part of the PR education process.



Alex Varney

With technology continuing to advance at a breakneck pace there is no shortage of companies vying for media attention, and no shortage of PR pros bombarding media in boxes with pitches. By investing the time in educating the media before you begin pitching them, you'll build a cohort of more knowledgeable reporters who will be able to write accurate, insightful stories for years to come.

Alex Varney is a Director at Stanton. ○

PR news brief

MMGY makes move on Wagstaff

MMGY Global acquires Wagstaff Media & Marketing, which specializes in the travel, culinary and hospitality lifestyle sectors.

The firm will now be known as MMGY Wagstaff. Mary Wagstaff, who founded the firm more than 20 years ago, will become partner and managing director for the MMGY Wagstaff brand.

"We have long been aware of Mary Wagstaff's brilliance and the great team she has built," Katie Briscoe, incoming MMGY CEO, told *O'Dwyer's*. "The forming of MMGY Wagstaff offers us the scale of talent, geography and expertise while also presenting new opportunities in luxury lifestyle, culinary and spirits."

MMGY Wagstaff and MMGY Global's existing North American PR, social and experiential brand, MMGY NJF, will continue to operate separately. Both will work with MMGY Global's European PR brand, MMGY Grifco, to connect clients to international markets.

With the addition of Wagstaff's San Francisco and Chicago locations, MMGY Global will now have over 500 employees and operate in 13 markets globally.



Reign down from the cloud.



As cloud-based platforms become today's norm, standing out from the competition and capturing buyer attention becomes even more challenging. Every day, we help tech organizations — from all industries and sizes — carve out market space, articulate their brand value and attract buyer attention. Hail to the innovators!

Discover how we help tech brands transform with purpose at PadillaCo.com.

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Why CISOs struggle to articulate cyber risk

Chief Information Security Officers are under immense pressure to demonstrate organizations' cyber readiness to their senior leadership and boards. FTI explores the challenges and scrutiny they face from a communications perspective.

By James Condon, Evan Roberts, Meredith Griffanti and Jamie Singer

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty and the constant shadow of threat actors working to undermine company security, it's clear that the role of Chief Information Security Officer and other equivalent information security roles are under more pressure than ever to demonstrate resilience, preparedness and response readiness, while addressing expectations from key internal and external stakeholders.

A new survey from FTI Consulting, Inc. reveals that this increased threat activity and a growing focus on companies' governance and oversight of cybersecurity means that, more than ever, CISOs are having to present to boardrooms and executive leadership on cybersecurity preparedness. The survey revealed that 97 percent of CISOs have been asked to present to their boards in the next 12 months and are now faced with the challenge of articulating cybersecurity risks and opportunities to an engaged audience.

"CISO: Communications Redefined, Navigating the Journey from Control Room to Boardroom" was conducted online between June and July 2022, consisting of more than 100 CISOs at large companies with global operations to understand both the opportunities and challenges facing CISOs as they navigate this transition and heightened exposure.

The research explores the communications challenges facing CISOs and those in charge of information security and has revealed they need to more clearly communicate—both internally and externally—their role, leadership and management of cybersecurity.

Among CISOs surveyed, 85 percent said that the prominence of cybersecurity on the board's agenda has increased over the last 12 months, with 79 percent feeling heightened scrutiny from senior leadership over cybersecurity and data privacy preparedness has increased, followed by more requests from senior leadership to demonstrate the company's cyber readiness plans and preparedness.

Naturally, scrutiny abounds from external sources too, especially from media. Over the last 12 months, CISOs claim the level of media scrutiny of their organization's cybersecurity and data privacy preparedness has increased, potentially magnifying the impact of any cybersecurity failings or breaches into the public domain.

To ensure effective external stakeholder

engagement on cybersecurity, CISOs must also be able to communicate effectively with internal stakeholders. However, the survey revealed that 58 percent claim to struggle with communicating technical language to senior leadership in a way that they can understand, and 82 percent of respondents claim that when they're in front of the board, they feel pressure to make things sound better than they really are.

With this perceived communications gap between CISOs and senior leadership, many feel misunderstood, and 66 percent believe senior leadership struggles to fully understand their role within the organization.

88 percent of CISOs recognize the importance of having regular engagement with their board and senior leadership to ensure effective management of cyber risk and possibly support their professional development. Similarly, 91 percent of CISOs feel that reporting to the CEO would help them achieve greater success in their role.

When looking closer into this perceived communications gap, the disconnect is most strongly seen among Chief Financial Officers, of whom 64 percent of respondents believe don't fully understand their role as CISO. This is a particular concern considering many CFOs are directly in charge of cybersecurity budgets, and if they don't understand to what they're allocating financial resources, these funds could be unjustly distributed to other business segments. This underscores the importance of CISOs to better communicate their role and their strategic importance to this audience in particular. The study results revealed that this misunderstanding is not solely among CFOs but also felt amongst chief compliance officer, chief marketing and chief human resources officers.

Despite growing awareness, over half of CISOs don't believe their board and senior leadership are completely prepared for cyber risks and 63 percent feel that their concerns are not aligned with senior leadership priorities. In order to maximize boardroom engagement, CISOs need to be armed with the skills to communicate and translate cyber risks into core business risks. With incidents on the rise, communication between CISOs and their leadership is more critical than ever before.

The study highlights critical communications struggles amongst CISOs and their leadership teams, with many CISOs feeling

they need practical support in translating technical matters into terms that will resonate with business leaders. Ultimately, a disconnect between the CISO and board and leadership priorities may negatively impact an organization's ability to effectively prepare and respond to a cyber incident.

While 88 percent of CISOs surveyed have experienced a cyber incident in the last 12 months, 46 percent of the respondents claim these incidents weren't mitigated quickly and continue to struggle to rebuild trust and confidence among leadership following the incident. 52 percent of CISOs claim that managing communications with internal and external stakeholders is the biggest challenge when responding to an incident, potentially leaving companies exposed to a possible incident or regulatory sanction.

Closing the communications disconnect with senior leadership on cyber risks, priorities and preparedness remains critical to an organization's cybersecurity. Ultimately, the CISO role is evolving, with many CISOs needing help navigating this transition. As the CISO gets closer to the board, they will need to speak the language of the boardroom and arm leaders with the necessary information to make appropriate risk decisions. 91 percent state that communications training and coaching on presenting to boards is key to helping them make transition.

James Condon is Senior Director, Digital & Insights, at FTI Consulting. Meredith Griffanti, Evan Roberts and Jamie Singer are co-Heads of Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Communications at FTI Consulting. ○



James Condon



Evan Roberts



Meredith Griffanti



Jamie Singer

Tactical storytelling can fuel e-commerce growth

Telling a compelling brand story is paramount for e-commerce and supply-chain brands looking to maintain relevance and overcome the present challenges that have hindered the industry for the past two years.

By Adam Novak

It's been a wild ride for e-commerce brands in the last few years. With ongoing supply chain struggles impacting the online global marketplace, brands in this space continually have to ask, "What next?"

Despite the supply-chain challenges that have dominated both news cycles and consumer consciousness since 2020, it's actually a good moment for innovative e-commerce brands. With consumers now accustomed to overnight shipping, same-day delivery and just-in-time everything, e-commerce has grown exponentially in recent years. E-commerce businesses that optimize their messaging and positioning can seize a unique moment for the industry and continue to move their brands forward.

What's changed?

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic dictated changes in consumer buying habits, the public's perception and use of e-commerce and supply chain shifted. At the time, it seemed possible that the shift was only temporary.

As lockdowns forced businesses to downsize, borders to close and shipping costs to rise, supply chains no longer functioned as flawlessly as they once had. This critical societal underpinning that so many had taken for granted for so long was now everyone's concern.

With that realization came widespread market attention. Venture-backed supply chain management companies raised a record amount of money in 2021, and that number has accelerated throughout 2022.

What seemed a temporary shift was, in fact, the beginning of an evolution. The technology supporting e-commerce and the supply chain ecosystem has never been more important than it is now. Building a compelling brand story, with the right message for the right audience, is key to maximizing the opportunities that exist today.

Investment in e-commerce brands

Data shows that venture capital firms recognize the potential for e-commerce brands at this moment. There is a unique chance now for these businesses to solve recurring pain points for customers on a broader scale, and expanding those solutions begins with telling a compelling story.

The supply chain is known as an industry relying on outdated processes, more likely utilizing spreadsheets than AI or machine learning. The pandemic shone a bright light on their outdated methods. Under pressure to solve unprecedented problems, there is a growing acceptance of innovative tech within the supply chain ecosystem, and investors are taking note.

Large funding rounds by tech companies are aiming to address the e-commerce supply chain conundrum. According to Crunchbase, 2021 was a banner year for venture-backed supply chain management companies, which saw \$11.3 billion in funding, a twofold increase from 2020. That represents almost a twofold increase from 2020 and easily beats the previous all-time high in 2019 which saw \$9.1 billion go to startups that look to keep the supply chain moving.

So, in this time of unparalleled investment, how can e-commerce and supply chain brands draw connections and cultivate relevance with the people they are trying to reach? Telling an authentic and relevant story is a good place to start.

Telling an effective e-commerce story

The first step in building an authentic story is to recognize that effective stories are a conversation between the storyteller and the audience. Brands must work to understand not just what their audience is looking for but also how they think about it.

What questions are people asking? Which topics are waning or growing in popularity? Are brands using the same words as the

audiences they're engaging with? Are the words brands are using to communicate reflective of how most people talk about these same topics? This alignment is an essential first step to ensuring a brand message will be heard for what it is. Examining your audience's pain points and tapping into shared language aligns brands with prospects.

No matter how niche a brand's products or services might be, its audience doesn't exist in a vacuum. Understanding the universe of conversations taking place throughout the industry ecosystem can provide insights into where and when to enter the conversation. Follow news and stories as they evolve, uncover themes and connect them across many distinct industries. That makes it easier to integrate a brand story into mainstream discussions where stakeholders will take notice.

A common pitfall for brands is putting all their work into developing the right message without understanding the right place to tell the story. A strategic narrative isn't enough. You also need a strategy to cascade it through sharper content and smarter distribution, leveraging earned, shared, owned and paid channels to reach the right stakeholders.

The right story in front of the right audiences with the right distribution—that's a winning storytelling strategy. Mar/Comm leaders can use authentic storytelling to address common business pain points, such as those facing e-commerce and supply-chain brands right now.

Adam Novak is Vice President at PAN Communications. ○



Adam Novak

Brands failing to live up to purpose

By Steve Barnes

While consumer expectations for a brand's sense of a purpose are climbing, many brands are dropping the ball when it comes to meeting those expectations.

That's the finding of the latest Purpose Priorities Report from Porter Novelli. The

annual report shows a drop from 6.89 (out of 10) in 2018 to 6.02 in this year's survey.

A large majority (84 percent) of the 7,000 adults who were surveyed for the study would agree with that, saying that they think "companies should demonstrate how they are following through on their promises to people, the planet and society."

Perhaps the most important issue on

which audiences want to see are a real sense of commitment is the environment: 78 percent think companies should have a point of view on environmental sustainability. A third (35 percent) of those surveyed indicated that they would start or increase purchasing from a company if it shared their view on environmental issues.

An additional third (32 percent) would be more likely to purchase from a company if it changed the way it operates in an effort to address diversity and inclusion. ○

How do you get media for a 'boring' client?

Nobody is boring to the right people. Put the right story and message in front of the right audiences.

By Dustin Siggins and Robert Kuykendall

When you buy a car, you probably think of the make—Toyota, General Motors, Volkswagen, etc. The leaders of these worldwide companies—Akio Toyoda, Mary Barra and Oliver Blume, respectively—may not even cross your mind.

But when you think of Tesla, only one name comes to mind: Elon Musk. His company isn't in the top 15 by sales, but he's transformed how hundreds of millions of people think about what's otherwise a ubiquitous, everyday, mundane product. His Tweets, speeches, statements and opinions shape news cycles, move the stock market and even change the course of war.

None of this is by accident. Musk spent years communicating his vision, success and progress in the press. He's a legend because he put better, more creative content in front of the right target audiences the right way.

Elon Musk, not cars, is the kinds of client most PR practitioners envision when they get into the industry. But without cars, Musk is just a rich has-been who left PayPal years ago. For Musk, cars are the launching pad for space, social change and even changing the course of a war.

For the most boring of clients or accounts, the solution to making them exciting is simple: create messaging and content that stand out and put them in the media homes that capture target markets' attention over and over again.

Why does your company exist?

"We know we're not the most exciting company," Parabilis VP of Operations Ryan Huss once said. He wasn't complaining; he was just thinking about how the public perceives money and finance. The stodgy loan officer in the movies is "boring," and, in the worst case, the "bad guy."

Parabilis provides loans to small business government contractors who need money fast, but don't qualify for a bank loan. It's not exactly the sexy business model most PR practitioners envision when considering their career, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Parabilis' small business financing expertise was exactly what the press was looking for. And we helped them deliver, putting two op-eds out in less than a week urging Congress to protect contractors.

What hooked the editors and soon put Parabilis on a top industry podcast wasn't finance or loans. It was their real mission: helping small business contractors. They've

run with that mission, hosting a growing podcast and even moderating a panel hosted by the U.S. Treasury Department as they've grown their team, partners and client base.

Lines of credit aren't exciting for everyone. But Parabilis has made this "boring" topic very exciting for its very specific audiences.

Provide unique solutions

At the end of the day, nothing is boring. Content can be mundane; stories can be ordinary. But with the right solution and the right promotion strategy, you can be the coolest kid in the sandbox.

That's what Money.com does with its list of best colleges and universities. Millions of Americans gripe about the cost of college. But what Money provides is a well-researched solution: analyzing the quality of America's top institutions, based in part on the price of attendance and post-graduation job placements. And their decision to release the list in May—when students and parents begin college tours—helped put their list go viral in the press, on social media and on colleges' websites.

Purdue President Mitch Daniels has likewise received tremendous media coverage for his disciplined and visionary leadership. Daniels has frozen tuition for 11 years, doubled donor revenue, increased the size of the student body and partnered with international firms. His leadership is his unique offering, and Purdue students and the surrounding communities are the beneficiaries.

Do something totally off the wall

"Like watching paint dry" isn't a compliment in American culture, but paint mixer Tony Piloseno saw something different. While the entire paint world was watching paint dry, Tony was mixing it on camera, creating a new story in one of the world's oldest commodities. His creativity first got him fired, then earned him viral press, then became a social media empire that drew 100 million eyeballs in 2021.

Going totally off the wall is risky. But it's also how you can cause an entire industry to think differently.

Focus on your niche target audience(s)

Americans love our pizza. We spend tens of billions of dollars a year on this great comfort food. But no matter how much you love your pie, you're not going across the country for the world's best. After all, it's just thin bread with cheese and some toppings. That's why no media in Hawaii, New York or Texas covered Riko's Pizza moving loca-

tions in Stamford, Connecticut. It's a local pizza franchise in a nation with thousands of them.

But local media devoured the news, covering the closing and the reopening. Riko's clearly built a brand that locals cared about, kept its eyes and PR on the right audiences and let the media tell customers where to go.

Get others to brag for you

Last year, a law firm won a disability accommodation lawsuit against a school district. It won because the firm has good lawyers, but that's just a day at the office. And most of us don't want to read about people in boring dark suits talking legalese.

But what many people might do is watch a local news story if we have kids in the district and/or have a disabled child, read a disabled student's story out of simple human interest and seek to understand how this decision impacts other school districts.

This story isn't about a lawyer winning a case; it's about changing how schools treat disabled students. That's a story of interest to disability rights activists, parents of disabled students, lawyers, teachers and even the general public.

It's a story that can't just be told by the lawyer. That's just bragging and everyone would tune him out. It must be told by his happy client and the student's parents. It has to be told by disability rights activists, politicians and school officials. It needs to be seen and heard in the press and on social media and turned from a stodgy courtroom case into a story of helping David beat Goliath.

What stands out to your audiences?

You're not alone in feeling that your clients are too ordinary to stand out. But somewhere is your unique opportunity to help them rise above the norm, to become the Elon Musk of your industry or community. Maybe it's their mission, or perhaps it's just doing something totally different or simply narrowing their target market focus.

The opportunity to make your client the most exciting thing since Elon Musk is there. Go find it.

Dustin Siggins is Founder of Proven Media Solutions. Robert Kuykendall is a campaign veteran and former non-profit executive who is now a private-sector entrepreneur. ○



Dustin Siggins



Robert Kuykendall

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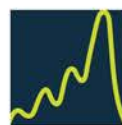
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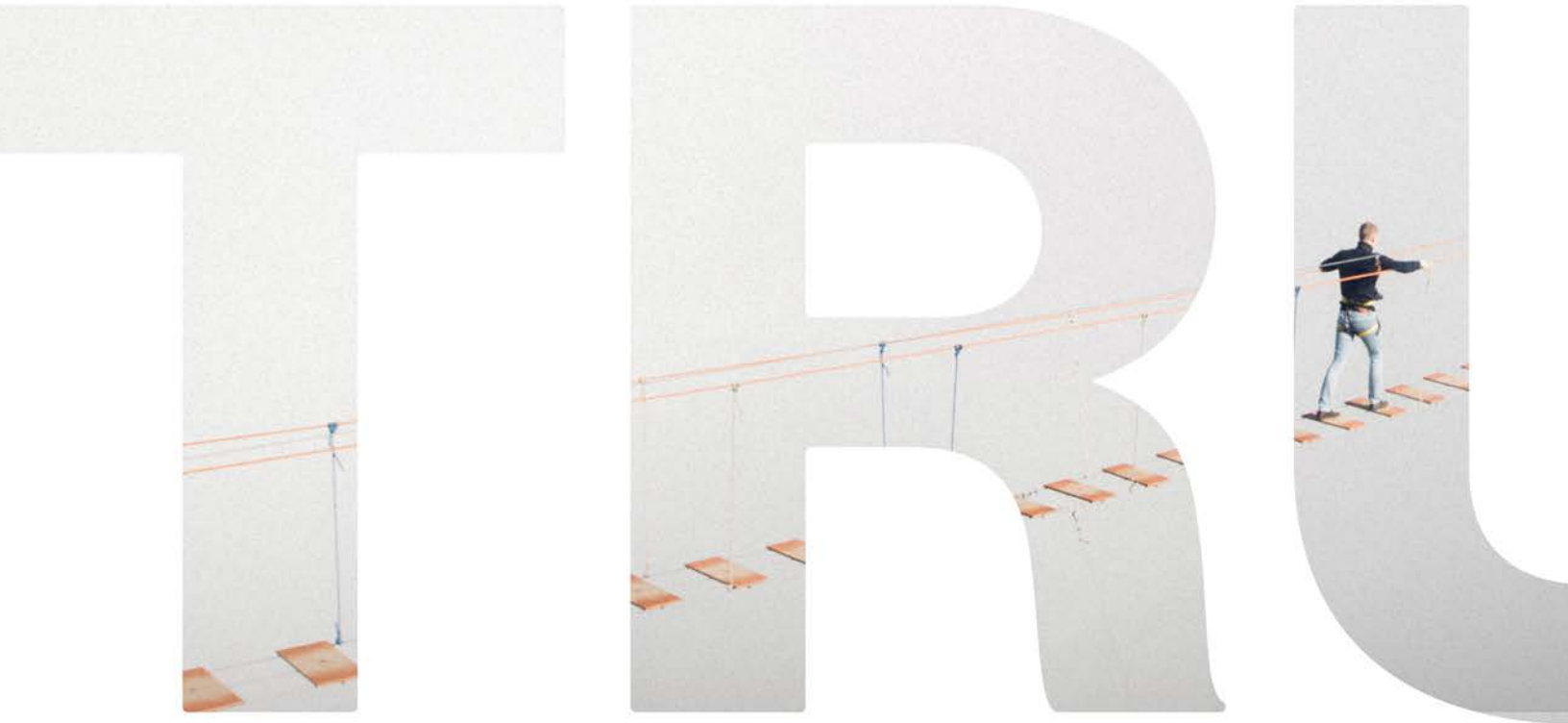
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Why a recession isn't necessarily bad for tech

As we head into another period of economic uncertainty, now is the perfect time for anyone running communications at a tech company to examine their corporate story.

By Sabrina Guttman

Debate rages on regarding whether or not major global economies, including the US, are currently in—or headed towards—a recession.

I'm not an economist, so I won't opine on what to call what we're currently living through, but with the NASDAQ off more than 30 percent since the beginning of the year, and with every tech company, from Amazon and Apple to Zillow and

Zoom, announcing hiring freezes or layoffs, there's no doubt that winter has come for the tech sector.

In May 2022, I wrote that a correction in the tech industry would mean "a return to fundamentals, in business and in how we communicate." Today, after more than a decade of growth and irrational exuberance, tech companies, large and small, public and private, are experiencing an undeniable slowdown.

While I'm sad for the people who have lost their jobs and incomes, I view this period as an opportunity for tech to get back to its roots. Without the pressure of keeping up with crazy expectations regarding growth and valuations, this is a great time for tech companies to remind themselves, their employees and their shareholders why they do what they do. And why what they do matters.

A return to fundamentals

When a company is regularly delivering to its shareholders, and employees are benefiting financially, it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture—of the place your company uniquely occupies, and what that means for your customers, your employees, your industry, the world.

So, as we move into this period of economic uncertainty, now is the perfect time for anyone running communications at a tech company to take a moment to examine their corporate story with a few things in mind:

1. It needs to come from the top. A corporate story shouldn't be a work of fiction; it should reflect the beliefs, knowledge and passion of those running the company. As such, executive leadership needs to not only buy in to the importance of a strong and ownable corporate story—they need to be actively engaged in developing and preaching it.

Asking a marketing communications team and/or agency to create a corporate story without direct participation from the

people who run the company and interact with its customers every day is a recipe for failure.

2. Context. Startups always have a Founders Story, typically used when talking to investors and prospective employees; it is meant to inspire. This is bigger than the "two guys in a garage" trope that is often used to describe Silicon Valley's entrepreneurial culture.

The Founders Story looks at the founding purpose of the company, the problem or opportunity those who started the company could see and had the passion and know-how to solve or seize. Reconnecting with that Founders Story, especially for more mature companies, is a good way to provide a unique context to your corporate story.

3. Ask why. In his book, *The Moral of the Story: A Storyteller's Guide to Helping Brands Build Relationships with People*, my colleague Jeff Freedman introduces the theory of "five whys" to get to the heart—or the "moral"—of a brand's story. He encourages his reader "to listen carefully and find the place or places where there is an opportunity to go deeper by asking why. And then (...) keep asking it until you can't dig any further."

Anyone who's ever dealt with an executive who is also an engineer knows that the first question will rarely lead you to an "aha!" moment. And, in my experience, asking smart questions is rarely frowned upon by those leaders.

4. Go long-form. In the corporate world, we have all become slaves to The Deck. And while you may want to ultimately develop a deck to tell your story, that is not where you should start. A good friend of mine who's also an executive at a competing agency said it well: "Today, people are obsessed with micro-stories and lose sight of the thread that connects them." By developing an actual narrative, you have the space to consider context and connection points that lead you to what actually matters.

5. Invest in communicating internally: A tech company's employees can be its biggest asset—or liability—in communicating why what they do matters.

My colleague Betsy Henning, the Founder of AHA, a FINN Company, and leader of FINN's Employee Engagement Practice, recently wrote: "We stand at a launching point where the solutions, bonds and trust

built throughout these challenging times can be seen for what they truly are—an opportunity for every company to become its better self—trusted in the eyes of the world, their clients and, most importantly, the employees who are the true beating heart of every company, every brand."

When I started my career more than 25 years ago, I believed wholeheartedly in the world-changing power of technology and the people who create it. Over the last decade or so, as the industry has matured and we've seen profits win over progress, it's been difficult not to view things with a more jaded eye.

My hope is that by taking a step back and focusing on their *raison d'être*, beyond the capitalist pursuit, the tech industry, and all of us who work in it, come out of this recession—or whatever we wind up calling it—with a greater sense of purpose.

Sabrina Guttman is Global Tech Practice Leader at Finn Partners. ○



Sabrina Guttman

PR news brief

FINN Partners teams with Galen Growth

Finn Partners has teamed with Galen Growth, a data-driven health market intelligence company, to chart the fragmented digital landscape, identify emerging trends and growth opportunities, and look beyond equity funding to explore what's next in the fast-paced market.

They will release their first report, "Global State of Digital Health," which draws input from more than 12,000 health ventures, at the HLTH Conference in Las Vegas next month.

The report will show that digital health venture capital rose from \$2 billion in 2011 to \$44 billion in 2021. North America accounted for 46 percent of the funding value.

Gil Bashe, who is Global Health and Purpose Chair at Finn Partners, told *O'Dwyer's* that it's misguided to consider year-to-year investment totals as an indicator of the sector's vitality.

"Funds that poured into digital health at the beginning of COVID fueled the pump of health innovation across the category—from self-care to sick care and remote patient monitoring to wearables," he said.

He said investment remains steady in many hot hub regions for innovation but it has shifted from late-stage to early-stage digital health technologies.

He promised the Finn Partners/Galen Growth report "will cut through the hype and offer an objective perspective."

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Don't be afraid to lean forward in B2B marketing

PR pros share their insights on several new opportunities that exist in today's B2B digital marketing world.

By Kyle Turner and Christine King

It's time for B2B marketers to evolve their mindsets about digital marketing. It's no longer enough to simply have the basics in place. To succeed and differentiate their brands, savvy marketers must be willing to experiment. They must also embrace the need to break down the internal silos that limit their ability to run truly integrated, omnichannel campaigns.

Too many companies approach B2B marketing in a very conservative and siloed manner. They often fall prey to the phenomenon of, "We know what works," and a desire among their various internal teams to deliver "guaranteed" results. But, by not pushing boundaries, they unintentionally miss opportunities to make a bigger impact by leaving other parts of the ubiquitous marketing funnel out of the equation.

In a survey conducted by Statista among U.S. B2B marketers between January and February of 2022, B2B product-focused marketers noted that their digital marketing spending was projected to increase by 13.59 percent. But despite having more budget, many B2B brands still fall short. That's because, according to another survey of B2B marketing professionals by Statista between June 2021 and May 2022, only eight percent of respondents reported believing their messaging strategy was "very effective."

In the following Q&A, Christine King, G&S Business Communications Vice President of Digital Marketing, and Kyle Turner, Director of Digital Growth, dive into the growing digital opportunities for B2B-focused brands, what the future of B2B digital marketing looks like, and why taking an omnichannel approach blending digital marketing with traditional comms is the way to go.

What is the perception of B2B digital marketing, and why is it seen the way it is?

Christine King (CK): B2B brands need to embrace their ability to be bold. They may not be as widely seen in mass media as consumer brands, but that does not mean they cannot be as innovative and cutting-edge. There is real power in looking at successful consumer campaigns and figuring out how to apply similar concepts of engagement to more niche, B2B audiences.

Kyle Turner (KT): You brought up a couple of good points I want to focus on. The innovation piece is interesting because I believe that a lot of B2C brands are influ-

enced by the cultural zeitgeist. B2B brands, to your point, can be more "back of the house." So, you do not get to see a lot of the cultural influence there, even though plenty of B2B companies are actually influenced by how culture impacts their consumer brand counterparts.

CK: Right, sometimes B2B can be hard to navigate. This has a lot to do with holding on to the old ways of doing business versus what we see in today's digital world. B2B marketing often lags the more consistent push in B2C for cutting-edge campaigns and regularly getting social media and digitally consumable content up and out.

Why does an omnichannel approach matter in a modern comms and marketing strategy?

KT: Comms and marketing are intertwined. As such, the messaging a brand shares with its audiences should be somewhat connected at every point a customer interacts with the brand. This is especially true in B2B, where millions of dollars are potentially on the line with each sale. So, we must think differently and realize that messaging should be continuously fine-tuned for greater impact by looking at indicators like search data and social listening data around a given topic. Understand that your message may take different forms, and certain parts of it should be more prominently emphasized, depending on where someone will see it. That is why an omnichannel approach is so important. It increases the connectivity, relevance and impact of your messaging.

CK: It's clear based on the research that many marketers are not confident in the content that they are putting out there. But, to be effective, you need the confidence to be able to walk into digital spaces, know the audience and be a part of the collective. That requires answering some core questions. Do you know how the target audiences see themselves? Do you know what's motivating them? Do you have a solid content plan for social? Have you staged the messaging on your website based on where the target audience will land? It's not enough to just do comms over here and marketing over there. You really must approach comms and marketing as two parts of an integrated whole. And that means leveraging every channel in concert with one another.

KT: Exactly. Part and parcel of that notion is organizational structure. One of the

things we try to do is have representation from each discipline at the table. That means somebody from our media team, somebody from our creative team and someone from our digital team partnered with our market communicators. This creates a core strategy team that has a multitude of experiences and a variety of different perspectives. From this core, we can create truly integrated, omnichannel approaches for any project we come across. An effective team structure is critical in digital marketing and is where many organizations fall short.

How do B2B brands stay competitive in an ever-evolving marketing world?

CK: There's often hesitancy around experimenting with new technology. Marketers can be fearful because if it doesn't work out, or things don't go the way that they think they should, they may face strong inertia to abandon the cutting-edge for more comfortable methods. To get a license to experiment, you must show the power of things like audience intelligence, persona building, mapping your customer journey, making sure that you understand who it is that you're marketing to from a B2B perspective, and how such tools will deliver better results over the long run.

KT: Being fearless and innovative about the way of communicating messaging is paramount. My advice is to look for inspiration in unlikely places and configure your marketing team to reward confident risk-taking and unconventional thinking. At G&S, we have also started making copious use of learning agendas to ensure more accountability in our programs by answering specific questions. This allows us to be bold and experiment, while also ensuring that we have a data-informed process to guide content iteration and campaign effectiveness.

CK: Another key to success is breaking



Kyle Turner



Christine King

— Continued on next page

Fake news thrives on 'alternative' social media sites

Alternative social media sites provide a community for a growing number of Americans who use these platforms to connect with others and stay informed on current events, but the fringe content that flows on these sites could be contributing to our polarized political environment.

By Jon Gingerich

For the past several years, a spate of alternative social media sites—Truth Social, Telegram and Gab, among others—have cropped up to great fanfare among a small but loyal community of news consumers seeking refuge from established social sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

According to a new Pew Research Center study, most consumers who turn to these sites do so to find a sense of community and to stay informed on current events. But much of the news media content flowing on these platforms raises questions regarding the credibility of the information found there, as well as whether it's contributing to Americans' increasing partisan divisions and polarized public discourse.

The study, which was conducted to analyze the world of alternative social media, found that relatively few Americans (only about six percent) regularly get their news from these sites. And among those who do, no single site is used for news by more than two percent of U.S. adults.

Despite their relative unpopularity, however, about two-thirds (65 percent) of those who rely on these sites for news said they feel a sense of community with like-minded people on these forums. Nearly a quarter (22 percent) said they view these sites as havens for free speech and an anti-censorship alternative to more established social

media platforms.

A majority of those who use these sites (56 percent) say they do so to stay informed on current events and issues. And more than half of them (52 percent) claim that the news they come across on these networks is content they wouldn't have encountered elsewhere.

These communities overwhelmingly lean conservative: two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) who said they regularly get their news from these sites identify as Republican or Republican-leaning. By contrast, a majority (55 percent) of those who get their news on more established social media sites identify as Democrat or Democratic-leaning.

A third (33 percent) of alternative social media news consumers also claim they've participated in in-person political rallies and 36 percent said they've donated money to accounts they follow on these sites.

Pew's analysis additionally found that more than half (54 percent) of the accounts on these sites appeal to some kind of political value or political orientation, with roughly a quarter (26 percent) expressing a right-leaning political orientation or support for former President Donald Trump. The study also discovered that six percent of prominent accounts on the site have a connection to the far-right QAnon conspiracy.

Perhaps the most telling detail: the Pew survey found that, unlike mainstream social media platforms, a majority of the news links contained on these sites (45 percent) come from other social media sites as opposed to legacy news organizations, which account for only four percent of news content.

The study also found that 15 percent of the most prominent accounts on these sites are from public figures who have been banned elsewhere—such as Trump—mostly due to spreading misinformation.

Finally, despite these sites' claims of being vanguards of free speech, the study discovered that most "alternative" social sites still moderate content to some degree and also give their users the ability to do the same. Much of this moderation includes removing posts that may contain violent, racist or offensive content, though the Pew study discovered that some of the content deleted was done so due to the political views expressed.

Pew's study surveyed more than 10,000 U.S. adults in May using the Center's American Trends Panel, a nationally representative list of randomly selected respondents.

The study also included an April audit of seven alternative social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. ○

LEAN FORWARD IN B2B MARKETING

Continued from page 16

down internal silos. We've both worked with companies who don't talk interdepartmentally or who don't know what department B is doing versus department A and department C doesn't know what department A or B is doing. So, when you come in to try to help them move the needle from a digital marketing or comms perspective, the first step is to get them to talk to each other.

What's one thing B2B Marketers should invest in, especially in the digital space?

CK: Machine learning should be a top priority because it can level-up analytics and measurement strategies. But, if your organization is not there yet, start by experimenting with digital content. Then focus on building truly integrated, omnichannel

plans that are based on personas as well as understanding the customer journey, and that truly integrates both digital marketing and traditional comms.

KT: Good point. I want to see brands devote real dollars and real time and resources to building stronger data structures as there is a plethora of information at our disposal now. There is so much we can pull platforms from like SEMRush, Netbase or Brandwatch and Buzzsumo or from places like Screaming Frog and Hubspot to help inform not just what the market communicators choose to pitch to media but also, what digital content and creative even makes the most sense to support it. And that must happen at the very beginning of planning.

So, it all comes down to mindset. To succeed, you must be willing to lean forward, experiment and embrace the power of omnichannel marketing.

Christine King is VP of Digital Marketing at G&S Business Communications. Kyle Turner is Director of Digital Growth at G&S Business Communications. ○

PR news brief

Stagwell acquires Epicenter Experience

Stagwell has acquired Epicenter Experience, an enterprise software company that leverages mobile and location data to map and sequence complex consumer behavior patterns.

Epicenter will become part of the Stagwell Marketing Cloud, the company's proprietary suite of software-as-a-service and data-as-a-service products built for in-house marketing teams.

Epicenter's cloud-based technology, The People Platform, allows companies to communicate with specific groups of consumers to receive additional direct response or to deliver personalized messaging or value at scale.

Is your thought leadership jelling?

Common missteps associated with the thought leadership process.

By Dan Garza

Thought leadership has become an increasingly bigger buzzword around Silicon Valley. Tech PR pros are learning that it's an excellent avenue to publicize their companies and gain favor with their bosses at the same time. In short, the idea behind thought leadership is to have top tech executives talk about the ills and issues in their industries and how they can be improved. That way, they can build an aura of technology leadership, authority and customer trust by letting their audiences know that their companies have the answers to their product development problems.

That may be a rather simple explanation. However, the big question is how are tech companies and PR pros going about creating that thought leadership and are those approaches jelling?

The right way

Common sense says the correct approach to developing a thought leadership program is to first engage with your company's executives. That's assuming the exec is willing to cooperate, collaborate and participate. Find out what their thinking is about the industries their company is engaging with; what are the pros and cons, the strengths and shortcomings, the issues and how to correct them. Foster a good working and collaborative relationship with them and build mutual respect. Make a list of their major industry perspectives and their thinking along those lines. Conduct interviews with execs and start ghosting their byline thought leadership articles, blogs, speeches and other appropriate content.

But that's not always the case

Meanwhile, some tech companies are deploying various ways of performing their thought leadership and, in so doing, some of those approaches create unnecessary and time-consuming complexities, misunderstandings and, in short, ineffective ways to achieve thought leadership. Some of the more effective include speaker bureaus with execs giving talks at industry conferences. Others prefer to fill their company websites with executive blogs. Still, others take the business and trade press route to get their thought leadership byline articles published.

From the ineffective side, some companies rely on the multi-level approach. In other words, lots of people are involved. For instance, one marketer starts out deciding on several possible topics for the exec's thought leadership article. This list goes to the second level of individuals—perhaps a select committee of corporate communications leaders or marketing people. Their assign-

ment is to “scrub” that list of topics, meaning check it out to see if they think that's what they want the exec to say.

Then it goes to the PR agency for further review. And perhaps, a new list of subjects originates there. But once a subject is selected, the PR pro ghostwriter is tasked to conduct research with his or her findings as the basis for writing the thought leadership piece. And fingers are crossed that the exec will like it and approve it.

This is where the top corporate communications exec comes into the picture to meet with that company exec to validate the piece and, in effect, convince the top exec it's a good article and should be placed for publication. And that's a roll of the dice.

What about the exec's say so?

Throughout this multi-level process, the most important missing element is the executive's viewpoint, meaning what he or she wants to say about a particular industry subject. Instead, that subject is hashed over by a marketing committee and produced in that manner. In effect, it becomes a faux-thought leadership or worse, a paid advertorial in some cases, and the reading customer audience is deceived into believing these are honest and true words coming from a perceived industry leader.

There are other flaws associated with this multi-level thought leadership process. Foremost is that the PR pro ghostwriter becomes the subject matter expert and not the executive. Having others select the topic in committees is a hit-or-miss approach. Chances are high the exec may not want to have his or her byline associated with a particular subject or article.

This method eliminates the value proposition and messaging that are critical in each published article or blog. Also, there are people's time and cost. Meanwhile, the PR agency stands to gain considerable client billing since projects like this are extended timewise as a general practice.

Even if you are dealing with an exec

You may be fortunate enough to get one-on-one sessions with the exec to uncover what he or she wants to say. Granted, an executive has been elevated to that position in large part due to his or her vast experience in a particular industry. So, it follows that person has an extensive reservoir of beliefs and industry information he or she may want to impart.

At this juncture, the PR pro has to be savvy enough to first see a lay of the land, so to speak, to get an understanding of the thought leadership executives. You have to

take into account the types of personalities you're about to deal with. Here are some of the most prominent.

There's the “no risk taker.” The bigger the company, the greater risk for the exec to be exposed via a bylined piece to potential criticism by his board members or investors. So, the exec weighs every word, lest they be criticized and ostracized, thereby jeopardizing his standing in the company.

Next is the fast, verbose, continuous talker, hard to nail down his/her most salient remarks; he or she jumps from one topic to the next and then has one story buried in another story. Then, at the end, they complain that the produced byline article doesn't reflect what he or she said during the sourcing meeting.

Then there's the exec who doesn't know the subject, relies on others to provide information and then doesn't like what is being written for his or her byline. A similar personality is the exec who is never pleased with what's written for them, although he or she provided the information for their byline article to the PR pro ghostwriter.

Of course, there's the exec who's close to a particular subject and knows it very well but feels there's not much interest in that subject among his/her target audiences. So, they don't want to pursue it, when you, the PR pro, know full well the subject in question hasn't had much public exposure in the industry.

Finally, there are execs who don't want to be bothered with marketing but want to deal solely with sales. In other cases, marketing executives simply shield execs from the PR pro ghostwriter because those execs are “oh, so busy” to be bothered by a lowly PR pro.

Despite these barriers, it's wise for PR pros to move into thought leadership because there are execs who are knowledgeable, cooperative and willing to take the time to work with you. Once you have access to a cooperative exec, you can assure them that you'll only take a minimum of his valuable time.

Also, these are the real-world caveats cited above when you decide thought leadership needs to be part of your PR plan. However, one has to be optimistic when mapping out your strategy. Keep in mind that once you team up with a cooperative and knowledgeable executive, you've overcome a major hurdle. From this point on, your thought leadership projects will jell.

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



Dan Garza

Boeing's McCormack moves to Chevron

Former Boeing Communications VP Sean McCormack will take the same title at Chevron on Nov. 1.

McCormack was most recently Managing Director at Trail-Runner International. Before spending nine years with Boeing, he was a Foreign Service Officer, posted to overseas assignments in Turkey and Algeria, as well as serving as Deputy White House Press Secretary and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Spokesman at the State Department.

In his new post, McCormack will be responsible for corporate and brand communications, in addition to reputation management, employee and executive communications. ○



Sean McCormack

Cleveland Cavaliers name Oguche CCO

The Cleveland Cavaliers name Susan Oguche EVP and CCO. Oguche most recently served as Director, Consumer Product Communications at Nike.

Oguche was previously head of communications at Sleep Number Corporation and has also held several senior communications posts at Procter & Gamble. In her new role, she will be responsible for the communications and public affairs strategy for the Cavaliers, as well as for Rock Entertainment Group and Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse. ○



Susan Oguche

FTI Consulting names Wrobel Global ESG chief

FTI Consulting has named Miriam Wrobel as Global Leader of its ESG and sustainability offering.

She joined FTI in 2021 after running her own consulting firm in the San Francisco Bay area for six years, advising clients on how to develop clean energy and ESG investment strategies.

Earlier, she was a Director at Citi and

Primary Relationship Manager for renewable and energy efficiency developers in the Bay area, Director of Solar Development at Invenergy, Director at Fotowatio Renewable Ventures and Associate at JPMorgan.

FTI's ESG & sustainability unit offers end-to-end support for clients via risk and investigations, compliance, finance, transactions, due diligence, cybersecurity and PR services. ○



Miriam Wrobel

Dentons adds human rights vet Vivanco

José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director of Human Rights Watch and legal advisor to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, has joined Dentons Global Advisors as a partner.

In his three decades of work, Vivanco has dealt directly with heads of state, parliaments, corporate executives, community leaders and NGO officials.

Based in Washington, he will advise DGA clients on labor practices, human rights issues, supply chain engagement, risk management and business intelligence.

Ed Reilly, CEO of DGA, cited Vivanco's experience navigating high-stakes situations, finding common ground and devising sustainable business strategies. ○



José Miguel Vivanco

Purple Strategies' Giordano joins Invariant

Natalie Giordano, a five-year veteran of Purple Strategies, has moved to Heather Podesta's Invariant as Director of External Communications.

Podesta noted that Invariant launched its strategic communications and PA practice three years ago, and Giordano will help increase the visibility of its new offerings.

Giordano also did stints at Hill+Knowlton Strategies and Weber Shandwick's Powell Tate unit.

She has managed



Natalie Giordano

corporate reputation and PA programs for clients in the financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and consumer packaged goods sectors. ○

Weber's Hart moves to Current Global

Current Global has named Charlie Hart, executive VP-integrated media, to help drive its influencer marketing efforts.

She joins Current from its Interpublic sister shop, Weber Shandwick, where Hart was EVP, Influencer Marketing and Digital Strategy during a nearly 11-year run.

Hart joined Weber in 2012. She had been Digital Strategy Director at Burson-Marsteller. ○



Charlie Hart

Stark quits UNH for Brodeur Partners

Mica Stark, chief communications officer at the University of New Hampshire, has joined Brodeur Partners to bolster the Boston-based firm's higher education offering.

At UNH, Stark led a 35-member team doing media relations, executive communications, branding, advocacy, crisis PR, social media and governmental outreach.

Stark also served as the school's Associate VP-Communications and Public Affairs. ○



Mica Stark

Omnicom names Medialink's Saxton CMO

Omnicom Group has named Kathleen Saxton Chief Marketing Officer. Saxton was most recently Managing Director EMEA at MediaLink, responsible for strategic consulting, agency selection, talent advisory, marketing and sales. ○



Kathleen Saxton

O'Dwyer's guide to TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATIONS

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No matter what your technology is, it can be a challenge to effectively communicate its benefits to each audience to drive your business goals.

Understanding what journalists, influencers, employees and investors want and need to hear is a specialty skill we hone.

The Abbi Agency has a proven track record of transforming complicated tech jargon into easy-to-understand messages that even a 5th grader can make sense of—because if no one understands your message, what's the point of pushing it out?

With expertise in Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), cloud computing, software, semiconductors, security, IT and IoT and experience across almost every tech sector including med-tech, adtech, martech, insurtech, fintech, you-name-it-tech, from start-up to 100-year-old company, we've been there, done that. But don't take our word for it, see what we've done in enterprise and B2B tech here: <https://theabbiagency.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/TheAbbiAgency-TechCapabilitiesDeck.pdf>

With offices in Reno and Las Vegas, Nevada and employees across every U.S. time zone and in both the UK and continental Europe, The Abbi Agency is ready for anything.

While The Abbi Agency got its start in public relations, its services now include creative, social, digital and web development capabilities—a full suite of integrated capabilities under one roof.

The Abbi Agency was named 2022 Midsize Agency of the Year by the Bulldog Awards, recently took home a Platinum Award for creative work at the international



Apples & Oranges Public Relations CEO & Director of PR Amore Philip.

Hermes Awards competition, and received a PR Platinum Awards honorable mention in the integrated communications, marketing and PR campaigns category.

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Meet the AOPR Team
video: https://aoprllc-my.sharepoint.com/:v/p/amore/EQqbuFrxEKVCru9yRsAj-3UBEPitVUjyYQLgS_J39P7-AQ?e=6eAaybn

Good PR Changes Hearts & Minds

For brands looking to get quick media placement or hits, Apples & Oranges Public Relations (AOPR)

would not be a good fit for you. If you want to leverage PR's power in your long-term growth strategy, you should certainly reach out.

Meet AOPR, an award-winning NYC-based Public Relations and Events agency driven by data and consumer behavior, which creates meaningful engagement between consumers, corporate brands, and socially driven organizations committed to building impactful brands and communities.

Ideal Projects: brands or companies with high stakes with big long-term goals such as expansion, launching a new product or service, attracting new partners and customers, positioning as industry experts or owning the market.

Verticals & Industries: Lifestyle, Government, Wellness, B2B.

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Upcoming News: Look out for a brand overhaul coming in 2023.

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James Cooper, Principal & Founder

Ascendant is a B2B communications agency established in 2003, supporting technology and professional services clients in the UK, and across Europe, with a range of services including media relations, AR, copywriting, messaging and market research.

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Matt Kovacs, President

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

Recent Awards:
PR Week, Best Places to Work
LA Business Journal, Best Places to Work

One Planet Awards, Gold—PR Campaign of the Year

One Planet Awards, Bronze—Product Launch of the Year

Clients include: Bike.com, Bio-friendly, BIOHM; Carbon; Denago eBikes; ES Minerals; and Way.com

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Kathleen Shanahan, CEO and Founder

A Digital PR Agency That Thinks Like a Demand-Generation Agency: BOCA Communica-

tions is an award-winning digital public relations agency that caters to B2B Tech and MedTech innovators. From VC-backed startups to global publicly traded companies, BOCA is proud of its client roster and long-standing partnerships. BOCA integrates inbound marketing and RevOps principles into its digital PR offerings, helping marketers reach their goal of driving business impact through brand awareness for customer conversion.

BOCA's services are curated to deliver measurable results that build brands, drive profitability and ultimately grow our clients' business.

An Integrated, Results-Oriented Methodology: BOCA's omnichannel communications approach starts with understanding its clients' business goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). Based on clients' needs, BOCA develops strategic plans with differentiated points of view and executive thought leadership narratives, all with the goal of driving tier-one influencer and media placements.

From thoughtful analyst relations to awards and speaking all the way to social and traditional media, BOCA partners to crush it with our clients.

Category Creation Through AR + Content = PR: PR is instrumental in supporting companies through category creation. It all starts with research—gaining perspective from industry analysts, influencers and stakeholders such as customers, partners and prospects. Then BOCA helps to identify the key issues and take action with a differentiated solution. BOCA partners with our clients to ensure anything and everything we do is high impact, SEO-driven, and amplified across all digital and traditional channels.

BOCA helps clients manifest the category through data-driven research and content, infuse it across the ecosystem and sing it from the rooftops.

Live and Breath Values: BOCAteers are a diverse group of digital PR strategists, media relations experts and former journalists. They are dedicated and tenacious professionals whose number one priority is client satisfaction achieved through strong, strategic partnerships and anchored in clear KPIs. BOCAteers are a group of genuine people who are fully invested in their clients' success. They are crazy creative and drive content to engage and entertain key target audiences, ultimately driving conversion.



Bospar is honored to be named an O'Dwyer's Top 50 PR Firm.

BOCAteers treat each and every person with dignity and respect—diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is part and parcel of the team's core. A passion for what they do is infused throughout their work.

Ultimately, BOCAteers are strategic and savvy—a team with a can do, drive-results attitude.

BOCA is headquartered in San Francisco with a virtual workforce spread across the United States. Additional information can be found at bocacommunications.com.

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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.

Forbes named us one of the best

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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 journalists 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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Terri Douglas, Co-Founder and Principal
Guy Murrel, Co-Founder and Principal

Catapult is a leading public relations agency for software delivery and 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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Since 2008, Crosswind Media & Public Relations has helped healthcare leaders across the country stay at the forefront of conversations that matter. As a full-service communications and public relations agency, our experts bring decades of experience to brand enrichment, effective messaging and compel-

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CROSSWIND

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ling public dialogue. We use our innovative approach in public relations, traditional and digital media, research, brand enrichment and marketing to develop fully integrated and multi-channel campaigns that make a difference. We believe in fashioning purposeful and impactful conversations that build pathways to success for more people, more often.

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Daljit Bhurji, CEO and Co-Founder
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Diffusion is an independent, global communications agency founded in 2008, operating a network of wholly owned offices including in New York, Los Angeles and London and an international partner network. The core of Diffusion's success is our unmatched ability to constantly strive for work that delivers meaning, purpose and measurable impact for our clients, our team and for society to take on the status quo and transform the future faster. Diffusion offers creative public relations services to clients spanning enterprise and consumer technology, retail, consumer lifestyle, travel and business services, including GoPro, parcelLab, Ghostery, SevenRooms and more. As early adopters with a deep understanding of technology and how it applies to our everyday lives, our consumer tech expertise covers everything from gadgets and gizmos to drones and other personal electronics. We fight the relentless battle for market and mindshare in the crowded enterprise tech space, and our passion and expertise spans software, cloud computing, cybersecurity, AI, IT consulting and beyond to overcome barriers to progress, inspire movements that power growth and to defend hard-won advances by protecting reputation.

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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.

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 custom-

ers, 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 one of the most fascinating segments in the PR industry and our team is proud to have played a key role in introducing core technologies which continue to shape the market today as well as new, cutting edge breakthroughs which will define tomorrow's marketplace.

Yesterday's bag phones are today's bendable smartphones. Proprietary VIC-20, Commodore 64 and Kaypros have been displaced by light as a feather iPads, chrome books and ubiquitous PCs. Noise cancelling headphones? We introduced them. Power over Ethernet? Check.

The pace of change is quickening. And not every new product enhancement is market changing. But as story tellers, marketers and advocates for our clients, we get a charge out of positioning, launching and building market awareness. Current tech clients include ClassWallet (digital wallet technology), HDMI Licensing Administrator, MV Realty (proptech), NCSolutions (ad/marketing tech), Leclanché (cleantech energy storage and e-mobility solutions), SurgePays (fintech & telecom), Vaultavo (crypto custody solution) and ZeeVee (AV signal distribution).

Preparing to launch a breakthrough ad technology or introduce new tech for e-commerce? Looking to get analyst feedback? Or determine how to explain to shareholders 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 250 professionals across three continents, FINN Partners is one the largest technology agency in the world. With senior professionals in the U.S., Europe, and Asia, the firm enjoys strong global growth.

Today's technology trends are disrupting and altering the way we engage in the world, completely changing dynamics across all industries and societies. We help innovators communicate how leading-edge technologies, from electrification and digitalization to automation, 5G connectivity, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, machine learning, robotic process automation, blockchain, and quantum computing, are transforming industries, and society, for the better.

The technology revolution impacts every single company. It includes big technology giants that need to transform and articulate their relevance. It touches emerging players that must demonstrate their potential, establish credibility, and communicate a compelling 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.

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

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Eric Fischgrund, Founder
Matt Bretzius, Partner
Ashley Willis, Vice President

FischTank PR is a communications and media relations firm known for its ability to understand our clients' business objectives and get results that fuel growth. FischTank works primarily in industries steeped in science, technology and innovation. This includes but is not limited to cleantech / sustainability / renewable energy, B2B tech, real estate and proptech, healthcare and others. First and foremost, FischTank PR is known for its results-driven approach to getting its clients' media coverage.

Incorporating an integrated strategy consisting of media relations, content writing, corporate communications, SEO/ORM, digital/social media, copywriting, and outbound marketing, FischTank helps clients amplify their message with results that impact their bottom line. In 2021 and 2022, FischTank was named to the *Inc.* 5000 by *Inc.* Magazine as one of the fastest growing companies in America, and was also named to the 2023 *PR News Agency Elite Top 100*.

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FleishmanHillard is comprised of a diverse team of technology practitioners with a breadth of experience in B2B, infrastructure, cybersecurity, 5G, edge and cloud computing, networking, mobility, collaboration, AI, ML and more. Our global experience goes beyond creating stories to meaningfully engage journalists, influencers, customers and consumers. Our award-winning teams specialize in media relations, reputation management, executive positioning, launches, events, analytics and intelligence, content development, creative campaigns, corporate social responsibility, and DE&I communications. We work with some of the world's most notable brands and give every client our best through highly experienced counselors and globally integrated teams. Our firm's honors include 2021 PProvoke Global Agency of the Year, 2021 ICCO Network of the Year, 2021 Campaign Global PR Agency of the Year, 2022 *PR Week* U.S. Agency of the Year and Outstanding Extra-Large Agency

of the Year; 2021 PProvoke APAC Consultancy of the Year; Human Rights Campaign Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality 2018-2021; and to Seramount's (formerly Working Mother Media) "Top Companies for Executive Women" list 2010-2021.

FRENCH/WEST/VAUGHAN

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

Founded in 1997, French/West/Vaughan (FWV) is the Southeast's leading public relations, public affairs, advertising and digital media agency, a distinction it has held since 2001.

FWV has developed countless PR campaigns and communications strategies to help brands and innovative start-ups stand out in a complex marketplace. From using data to insert clients into conversations about the Internet of Things (IoT), creating media events to demonstrate their expertise or developing clear messaging around a complex product or issue, our work is often the foundation on which category leadership is built.

FWV's tech PR experience includes work done on behalf of 3Flow, A4 Health Systems, ABB, Airwayz, Dunn Solutions Group, Foresight Corporation, Freedom Solar, Lenovo, MDeverywhere, Neopatents, Reflexion, Saft, SAS, SunCom, Time Warner Cable and WolfSpeed. In addition to these more traditional tech brands, the agency also has experience with sports-tech clients such as CapTech and Skytrak, as well as entertainment/lifestyle tech clients including Flitix and ReverbNation.

In addition to its diverse range of technology clients, FWV's passionate team of expert storytellers works with many of the world's leading companies and brands, including Wrangler, Proximo, Melitta, Volvo Trucks North America, Teen Cancer America and the N.C. Department of Transportation, just to name a few.

Among its partners and affiliates are: FWV Fetching, a pet and animal health PR and marketing agency; AMP3 PR, a fashion, beauty, luxury and lifestyle PR firm (New



In 2022, Feintuch's cleantech practice announced that its long-term client, Leclanché, had been selected to provide the battery technology for Scandlines' world's largest zero-emission ferry.

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FRENCH/WEST/VAUGHAN

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York City); CGPR, an active lifestyle, outdoor, ski, fashion, technology and travel PR and consumer brand marketing agency (Greater Boston) and Prix Productions, the company's longform content feature and documentary film division, with offices in Raleigh and L.A. FWV employs more than 130 public relations, public affairs, social media, advertising and digital marketing experts between its Raleigh, N.C., headquarters and offices around the country.

FTI CONSULTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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Mark McCall, Global Segment Leader

C-suites, boards of directors, and business leaders from around the world come to FTI Strategic Communications with their most complex, business-critical issues that require diverse skill sets and integrated disciplines. As part of a global business advisory firm, we help these organizations manage change, mitigate risk and enhance their market position by combining decades of deep subject matter expertise with functional and disciplinary experience.

Our financial communications

professionals serve as trusted advisors to management teams on a range of capital markets events as well as other stakeholder issues throughout the corporate life-cycle. We help clients navigate their most pressing challenges and opportunities around M&A, IPOs, restructuring, capital raising, corporate governance, ESG strategy, proxy fights, and shareholder activism. Our integrated capabilities in financial communications, corporate reputation and public affairs help clients protect and drive business value.

FUSION PR

1441 Broadway, 3rd Floor
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www.fusionpr.com/

Jordan Chanofsky, Founder and CEO
Bob Geller, President
Olga Shmukliyer, Senior Vice President

Fusion PR is a bicoastal agency that specializes in B2C and B2B tech. Founded in 2000 and based in New York City, Fusion stands out for its unusual and eclectic team. We blend deep tech and industry expertise with award-winning creatives and writers to tell stories that resonate far beyond the typical PR team.

It's never been a more challenging world in communications—particularly for lesser-known brands, or ones that have complicated or controversial stories to tell. World events, polarization, and constant interruptions distract your audiences. Fragmented media are harder to

reach and influence. The hot button issues and earth-shattering news stories get most of the attention.

Fusion PR is the catalyst that can make the difference in your brand awareness and success. We employ traditional and digital channels, communicating through the gatekeepers and directly with key audiences, unleashing creativity and tapping our networks to elevate your story.

Tech segments served include cybersecurity, physical security telecom, insurtech, fintech, proptech, web/e-commerce, mobile, CE, deep and core tech, enterprise IT and cloud, and blockchain/cryptocurrency.

In the last several years, the agency provided PR support that helped more than 25 clients achieve successful exits; three clients have remained with the firm to this day despite new ownership (XM Cyber, which was sold to Schwarz Group, ITEC Entertainment, acquired by TAIT Towers; and Plarium which was acquired by Aristocrat for \$500M). Other clients have included Celebrite, Insurity, Panasonic, Motorola, Amdocs, Allot, Pantech, PanAmSat, ThetaRay, ClickTale, Lucent, Mellanox, Nice Systems, Hospital IQ, BlockSafe, XpertDoc, and Rollins College.

G&S BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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Steve Halsey, Chief Growth Officer
SHalsey@gscommunications.com

G&S Business Communications helps innovative companies change the world. We can help you create seamless, measurable, predictive and emotive online environments and campaigns. Whether your company is B2B, B2C or B2B2C, audiences are connecting with you 24/7 on nearly every device, upping the ante for how you entice, engage and delight your customers. We can help you anticipate their needs and drive meaningful engagement at each point of the customer journey.

Our digital marketing and insights expertise includes: Conversion Rate Optimization; Customer Journey Mapping; Digital Advertising; Email Marketing; Innovation and Transformation; Lead Nurturing & Database Management; Lead Scoring; Performance Marketing / Digital Analytics; SEO / SEM; Social Media & Engagement; User Experience / User Interface; and Web Development & Maintenance.

Our digital strategies help clients meet their business goals. Let's work together to inspire people to take action and fuel transformation for your business and markets.

THE HOFFMAN AGENCY

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Caroline Hsu, Global Technology Officer (APAC contact)
Kymra Knuth, EVP, North America
Steve Jursa, EVP, North America
Mark Pinsent, Managing Director, Europe
Lydia Lau, CFO / EVP of Global Operations

Defining communications broadly to include digital, content marketing, thought leadership as well as traditional PR, The Hoffman Agency knows how to differentiate brands and deliver air cover for sales. With heritage in the technology sector, the firm's work today cuts across a range of industries.

While campaigns vary by client and industry, all share one theme: the creation of content that reflects the tenets of storytelling. This means developing narratives (http://www.storytelling-techniques.com) that prompt journalists to write and target audiences to read—a far cry from the “corporate speak” that satisfies internal stakeholders. Toward this end, the firm



The Hoffman Agency's leadership team from around the world gathered for its Global Summit in Silicon Valley last October.

conducts storytelling workshops for internal communicators, executives and employees.

HUNTER

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Grace Leong, Chief Executive Officer
Jonathan Lyon, Chief Operating Officer
Gigi García Russo, Chief Innovation and Growth Officer

Contact: smormar@hunterpr.com
Samara Farber Mormar, Chief Marketing Officer

“ALEXA, who is HUNTER?” HUNTER is an award-winning consumer marketing communications firm ranked as a “Best Place to Work” and “Consumer Agency of the Year” with offices in New York, Los Angeles and London and partnerships that extend our reach globally. Beginning with research-driven insights, HUNTER executes strategic, integrated programs that build brand equity, increase engagement, and drive measurable business results. The 240+ person firm employs a powerful blend of marketing solutions including strategic planning, earned media relations, social and digital media, talent and influencer engagement, experiential marketing, multicultural outreach, and content creation and distribution across all platforms and channels to earn attention. We create, place, share and amplify brand narratives for some of the world’s best known and most beloved companies.

With an infinite scroll of gifts, devices, and the latest and greatest in smart tech, how do we convince consumers our brands have a place in their homes, workspaces, and mesh with their busy lifestyles and leisure activities? Our HUNTER: Retail + Technology team is on a mission to ensure that consumers find brands and products that help them live happier and more productive lives. By collaborating with tech experts, media properties, influential voices, and target-right partners, we ensure brand narratives are popping up where people are seeking information, inspiration and doing their shopping.

In partnership with some of the most respected companies and brands in tech, retail and lifestyle, HUNTER’s work has covered smart home devices, speakers, smart glasses, interactive video calling devices, earbuds, televisions, e-readers, home security,



To drive brand warmth and showcase how the Amazon Echo Show device can connect people, even when they are far apart, HUNTER developed the #ForTheGrams holiday campaign tapping SNL star Pete Davidson and his grandfather, Stephen (Poppy) Davidson to demonstrate how Amazon Devices could keep holiday traditions alive through a heartwarming video. To supplement the hero video’s efforts to educate audiences and expand the visibility of the campaign, Amazon enlisted “grandfluencers” = grandparent social media influencers over the age of 60. These lovable personalities used the Echo Show to create a range of content for Instagram and TikTok.

music streaming, kid-friendly devices, telehealth, projectors, sleep trackers, fitness trackers and screen protectors. Additionally, HUNTER has worked with many leading brands in the telehealth space, marketing devices that keep families happy, healthy, and safe.

ICR

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Bo Park, Managing Partner & Head of Technology PR & Modern Mobility
Matt Lindberg, Partner
Kevin McLaughlin, Managing Director
Dan Brennan, Senior Vice President
Katie Creaser, Senior Vice President

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, Digital Payments & Ecommerce, Fintech, Martech & Adtech, Data & Analytics, Cybersecurity, EV & eVTOL, Crypto Currency, IT and IoT. ICR maintains offices in New York, Connecticut, Boston, Baltimore, San Diego, San Francisco and Beijing.

Clients: EVgo, HARMAN (wholly owned subsidiary of Samsung Electronics), ironSource, Marqeta, Mobileye, QuantumScape, Zapata Computing and Zeta Global.

KARBO COMMUNICATIONS

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Additional offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Raleigh, NC, Venice, FL and Redwood City, CA

Julie Karbo, Founder & CEO

Karbo Communications is a top ranked, integrated technology PR and digital 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, attracting funding and staffing, deploying content marketing strategies, driving traffic, building communities, or strengthening partnerships.

We’ve pioneered digital marketing and PR efforts across categories and industries, such as cloud/SaaS, data/analytics, AI, High Performance Computing (HPC), security, the IIoT/IoT, social, consumer apps, semiconductor, data center, and virtual and augmented reality. Our teams are experts in virtually every vertical market including finance, healthcare, ed tech, automotive, energy, climate tech, sales/logistics, sustainability, e-commerce, legal, telecom, pharma, government, small business, Web3/crypto, agtech, HR, retail, food tech, gaming and more.

The Karbo Com team has worked extensively with both B2B and consumer tech companies, including Apple, AppDynamics, NerdWallet, Snowflake, NerdWallet, TIBCO, Hootsuite, The IoT World Conference, Equinix, Cisco, Bugerowd, Defense.Net, Juniper Networks, DarkTrace, GoDaddy, Airbnb, Logitech, Oracle, DemandBase, TDK, Real Time Innovations (RTI), 500 Startups, Intel, NVIDIA, and more. 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, employees, and funding.

Current clients include Hootsuite, ConsenSys, Promethean World, Penguin Computing, RTI (Real-Time Innovations), vFunction, Inseego, Mapbox, Sendinblue, Incognia, Treasury Prime, W3BCLOUD and Subtext.

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Additional locations worldwide via
Public Relations Global Network

Sean Dowdall, President

Landis is a full-service public relations and marketing communications agency.

At Landis Communications Inc., we offer communications services to meet our clients' needs and help them grow their businesses. We are a one-stop resource, acting as a strategic business partner for our clients by providing marketing, public relations and communications services. At Landis, we do it all: from developing social media marketing, content marketing and digital marketing strategies, to providing branding, positioning and crisis communication counsel. We specialize in B2B tech, autonomous mobility, green tech, health technology and biotech.

The Landis team has worked with tech brands AEye Inc., Altais, Velodyne Lidar, iTradeNetwork, Brain Health Registry, Maxthon, Selequity, TRUSTe, Sony, Sivel, Amgen, Care4Today, Frontier Medicines and many more. Our 32 years of experience and team of senior counselors allows us to provide strategic counsel and flawless implementation to clients, while allowing room for creativity to shine.

LAUNCHSQUAD

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Lisa Picasso, Consumer Practice Lead

LaunchSquad is an award-winning creative communications and



Karbo Communications produces a customer case study video for client Penguin Computing. The featured customer: the makers of the movie Gemini Man.

public relations agency with offices in New York, San Francisco, Boston and Chicago and employees working virtually across 22 states and three continents. We are a group of 100+ dynamic storytellers who specialize in creating and sharing the stories of fast-growing, change-the-world companies.

Over the past 22 years, our work has helped clients raise billions of dollars in funding, fueled IPOs and multi-billion dollar exits, and taken countless upstarts from unknown brands to market leaders. LaunchSquad takes a holistic approach to storytelling through earned, owned and paid media for consumer and B2B growth stage brands across diverse industries including climate/energy, healthcare, transportation, consumer and enterprise technology, entertainment and media, e-commerce, finance, retail and more.

Clients include: Arcadia, Any-scale, General Catalyst, Goodwill Finds, Monday.com, Netflix, On Running, The Trevor Project, Uber, and Zipline.

MERRITT GROUP, INC.

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Shahed Ahmed, Senior Vice President, Partner
Michelle Schafer, Senior Vice President, Partner
Matt Donovan, Senior Vice President, Partner

Merritt Group is an award-winning, woman-owned strategic communications firm—and we are celebrating our 25th anniversary this year! We are a mid-sized agency based in McLean, Virginia with staff across the U.S. in San Francisco, Dallas, Boston, Denver and more. Merritt Group specializes in public relations, messaging, branding/creative, content strategy & creation, SEO, social media, demand and lead generation, website development/design and marketing infrastructure consulting.

The success of our client campaigns is grounded in our extensive domain knowledge in market moving technology areas such as cybersecurity, AI, IoT, cloud, quantum, blockchain and mobile, as well as key verticals such as government, healthcare, retail, energy & utilities, transportation, banking and more. Our philosophy starts with intrinsically understanding our clients' target audiences, which leads to the development of powerful messaging and creative PR, marketing, content programs that drive high impact awareness, engages

audiences and accelerates sales around their innovations.

At Merritt Group, we help our clients harness the power of a new era of influencers and digital technology—one that extends beyond just the mainstream media as the arbiters of reach. We are disciples of Digital PR, the confluence of traditional PR strategy, SEO, content marketing and social media. We build credibility with differentiated messaging and content that multiplies your brand impact and injects and amplifies your PR campaigns with digital strategies and tactics to reach your target audiences quickly and efficiently.

Our client roster includes organizations ranging from large, global leaders to emerging, venture-backed innovators—all with a focus on technology.

PADILLA

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Amy Fisher, Senior Vice President
Danielle Engholm, Senior Vice President

Padilla is a full-service public relations agency that transforms brands and organizations through strategically creative communications. Our work across deep areas of sector expertise in agriculture and environmental sciences, food,

beverage and nutrition, health, technology and financial services, is consistently recognized by industry partners such as *PRWeek*, *PRovoke* and *PRSA*, among others. Padilla operates in seven cities in the U.S. through its family of brands which includes, *SHIFT*, *FoodMinds*, *Joe Smith* and *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 technology brands of all sizes including 3M, Rockwell Automation, Battelle, Calabrio, Crisp and Direct Source.

As an AVENIR GLOBAL company and a founding member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, the agency provides services to clients through 155 offices worldwide. Transform with purpose at PadillaCo.com.

PAN COMMUNICATIONS

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Mark Nardone, Chief Marketing Officer
Elizabeth Famiglietti, Chief People and Culture Officer
Darlene Doyle, Chief Client Officer
Gary Torpey, Chief Financial Officer
Meg Kessler, Executive Vice President
Dan Martin, EVP, Healthcare
Juliana Allen, Executive Vice President
Gene Carozza, Senior Vice President, Technology & Head of Operations
Matthew Briggs, Senior Vice President, Healthcare
Emily Holt, Senior Vice President
Kari Hulley, Senior Vice President
Gareth Thomas, Managing Director, UK

PAN Communications is a leading integrated marketing and PR

agency servicing B2B tech and healthcare brands. With 27+ years of experience, PAN helps companies transform ideas into captivating stories that align to mid- and late-stage growth strategies through the firm's NXT Stage approach. Recognized as an Agency of the Year and Best Mid-sized Agency to Work For, PAN has office locations in Boston, San Francisco, New York, Orlando and London, as well as a growing virtual community. The agency is positioned to help brands emerge in new markets and scale globally, with experience driving integrated strategy across a variety of brands like Rapid 7, Citrix, Quickbase, OneStream, Radial, athenahealth and Smartly.io. PAN strives to help today's modern marketers by integrating a combination of services to better engage with target audiences and move markets.

Connected Content—Creative Storytelling—Results that Matter!

Clients include: Absolute Software, Algolia, Amwell, athenahealth, Booz Allen, Botify, Citrix, Clarify Health, Cogito, Colibra, Enthought, HealthEdge, iCIMS, LeanTaaS, Quickbase, MediaMath, Menlo Security, NTT Data Services, Optimizely, Rapid7, Toshiba/Americas, UPS Capital, and Veeam.

RACEPOINT GLOBAL

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Also serving clients through staffers based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Larry Weber, Chief Executive Officer/Chairman
Bob Osmond, President
Phil Chadwick, CFO
Carolyn Regan, Senior VP, People
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



Ted Miller Group Founder and Principal Ted Miller.

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. In 2021, RPG was named a *PRWeek* Top 100 U.S. integrated communications agency, a Top 15 U.S. Technology PR Agency by *O'Dwyer's*, a *PRovoke* Global Top 250 agency and ranked in the Top 25 of *Boston Business Journal's* Largest PR Firms in Massachusetts list.

Clients include: ACD/Labs, Analog Devices, Atmosic Technologies, Consigli Construction, Duck Creek Technologies, eClinicalWorks, E Ink, Infinix, MediaTek, Mythic, Panasonic Connect North America, Qlik, RISC-V, Semtech, and SiFive.

STANTON

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Alex Stanton, CEO
Tom Faust, **Charlyn Lusk**, Managing Directors
Liam Collopy, **Matt Conroy**, **Katrin Lieberwirth**, **Mike Goodwin**, Senior Vice Presidents

The Stanton team has a distinguished track record of helping leading companies and emerging innovators tell their story so media not only understand it, but want to write about it. We excel at simple, compelling explanations of complex technologies and demonstrating real-world impact. This approach moves the story beyond tech trade media to connect with broader business and financial audiences critical to strong technology brands. From launching new companies and products to cultivating relationships with business partners, industry thought leaders, analysts and influencers, our work helps tech clients capture mindshare and build leadership. Our experience spans AI and machine learning, fintech, proptech, healthtech, legaltech, secure messaging, networking, software development, and SaaS enterprise software.

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Ted Miller, Founder & Principal

Ted Miller Group (TMG) is a fully-remote, boutique PR agency founded and based in Miami, the fastest growing tech hub in the nation. Our team is an experienced group of publicists, tech enthusiasts, strategists, writers, trend watchers, and consumers. We specialize in PR, content creation, copywriting, industry intelligence and storytelling, working with companies at various stages—from startup to enterprise—in a diverse range of technology disciplines (smart home, SaaS, consumer tech, travel, health, and more) to develop and execute meaningful campaigns that reach real audiences.

Our media relationships span across various verticals including tech, business, lifestyle, travel, health, US Hispanic and more, and our effective, highly personalized

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TED MILLER GROUP

Continued from page 39

communications strategies deliver impactful and impressive results that exceed our clients' expectations.

With offices in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area, Stanton is a full-service agency that supports our clients across a variety of communications disciplines including media relations, brand messaging, content development and marketing, executive visibility, thought leadership, digital and traditional marketing, reputation & change management, executive counsel, and social media. Our senior professionals spend the majority of their time on client work, ask tough questions, challenge assumptions, and suggest bold solutions. Clients find a home at our firm because we deliver a unique blend of smart strategy, strong relationships, innovative thinking, and first-class execution that produces business-changing results.

TIER ONE PARTNERS

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Marian Hughes, Co-Founder,
Managing Partner - Chicago
Sue Parente, Co-Founder,
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Kathy Wilson, Co-Founder,
Managing Partner - Boston

Tier One Partners delivers PR, Content, and Digital Marketing programs that drive measurable results. Our integrated marketing communications programs, and services including strategy, content, communications, creative, and digital, help technology innovators in sectors including the Cloud, cyber security, data, AI, MarTech, and energy tech "thrive on change" while remaining true to their purpose and customer value proposition.

Our proprietary Agile Communications methodology taps into the collective consciousness of technology business and consumer audiences and applies fast-acting, creative, and nimble programming to bring a brand's vision and mission to the forefront—and keep it

there.

In today's environment of rapidly shifting market dynamics, our programs respond to those shifts while staying focused on business and marketing goals. Change creates opportunity, so we design our plans in quarterly sprints with weekly and monthly adjustment check-ins. This lets us add new strategies and tactics to drive higher, in-the-moment impact. We integrate modern PR and marketing analytics to measure program effectiveness and continuously iterate to test new strategies and approaches.

Our Agile Insights practice helps us spot trends and insert our clients' perspectives into the national conversation at the right time when their insights matter most. We use multiple, cross-agency tools to identify and share potential trends and business issues, enabling our clients to capitalize on the most relevant thought leadership opportunities.

Co-headquartered in Boston and Chicago, Tier One is a 19-year-old, certified women owned business. We're proud to have built brand awareness for disruptive technology organizations including Colibra, Ultimate Software, 24M, Altair, Prophix, 55, and Hitachi ID.

TREVELINO/KELLER

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Founded almost 20 years ago, in the wake of the dot.com crash, Trevelino/Keller has established itself as one of the region's most accomplished technology firms. With a strong technology pedigree in the startup space, it has played a critical agency role in the launch of brands like Carvana and exit strategies for companies like Paymetric and NextTraq. The firm has also successfully leveraged its experience across its practices—healthcare [SOCTelemed, Biocept], financial services [Blankfactor, FactorTrust], food and beverage [Tillster, Franklin Junction], environment [Lehigh Technologies, WinCup] and lifestyle [QBTech, Verb].

One of Atlanta's leading tech industry segments in the last 10 years has been the transformation from a payments processing hub to a broader fin-tech marketplace. As a result, Trevelino/Keller has served as agency of record for



Trevelino/Keller had the distinction of launching unicorn Carvana in 2012. 10 years later, it continues to support the "unicorn" brand, introducing its largest car vending machine in Midtown Atlanta.

Fin-Tech South, the annual conference backed by the Technology Association of Georgia. Also of note is the firm's successful work with consumer-tech, including its long-standing work in the used car market with Carvana, and more recently with tech-powered nurse staffing platform, SnapNurse, this year's #2 Inc. 5000 company.

Of course, the firm remains heavily focused on the deep technology industry, representing brands like Adaptigent which serves the mainframe and software industries, RMS and Solonis, hospitality tech companies and Go Instore, a retail technology solution. Within Atlanta's technology ecosystem, Trevelino/Keller is the most visible working 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 coast to coast.

(W)RIGHT ON COMMUNICATIONS

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Grant Wright, CEO
Julie Wright, President & Founder
David Cumpston, Associate VP

We're an agency that speaks XR, kWh, Gbps and more. We're storytellers, strategists and creatives. And we're standing by to evangelize your extended reality, cleantech, wireless and other technology breakthroughs.

Named one of America's Best PR Agencies by *Forbes*, (W)right On Communications is a strategic communications partner who keeps pace with technology trends and PR best practices for our client partners.

Our B2B and Tech group is led by seasoned professionals. (Let's just say that this is not our first hackathon.) We lean into your world to become an extension of your team and bring the benefits of your technology to life through media outreach and events, thought leadership, analyst relations, social campaigns, video and digital design. From the trade show floor to the speaker's lectern, from beta to the next generation, our media professionals get your message right and in front of the right people.

Via our worldwide agency network, IPRN, we have reach into global markets with localized communications support. And (W)right On Communications also offers experienced crisis communications, issues management, media training and presentation training plus in-house branding, design and digital productions. Connect with us at www.wrightoncomm.com. ○

O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

TOP TECHNOLOGY PR FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2021)	Firm	Net Fees (2021)
1. Edelman , New York, NY	\$281,151,000	38. Standing Partnership , St. Louis, MO	\$1,794,392
2. ICR , New York, NY	57,010,094	39. Coyne PR , Parsippany, NJ	1,700,000
3. Hotwire , New York, NY	48,223,657	40. Kivvit , Chicago, IL	1,608,789
4. Finn Partners , New York, NY	46,150,000	41. French West Vaughan , Raleigh, NC	1,200,585
5. Zeno Group , New York, NY	30,205,038	42. Rally Point Public Relations , New York, NY	1,163,490
6. Highwire PR , San Francisco, CA	29,248,298	43. Tier One Partners , Boston, MA	1,137,328
7. Walker Sands , Chicago, IL	28,486,242	44. Firecracker PR , Brea, CA	1,113,000
8. Ruder Finn Inc. , New York, NY	21,270,000	45. Pierpont Communications , Houston, TX	1,107,848
9. Hoffman Agency, The , San Jose, CA	20,158,000	46. 360PR+ , Boston, MA	986,467
10. PAN Communications , Boston, MA	19,918,991	47. CommCentric Solutions, Inc. , Tampa, FL	939,970
11. APCO Worldwide , Washington, DC	18,365,600	48. Feintuch Communications , New York, NY	709,684
12. Inkhouse , Waltham, MA	16,065,029	49. Jackson Spalding , Atlanta, GA	667,187
13. Clarity , New York, NY	14,428,176	50. Berk Communications , New York, NY	630,000
14. Wachsman , New York, NY	13,958,572	51. Bellmont Partners , Minneapolis, MN	544,588
15. 5W Public Relations , New York, NY	12,800,000	52. Novitas Communications , Denver, CO	516,000
16. MikeWorldWide , New York, NY	12,439,795	53. Virgo PR , New York, NY	500,000
17. Matter Communications , Boston, MA	11,706,000	54. Brownstein Group , Philadelphia, PA	405,844
18. Bospar , San Francisco, CA	11,310,344	55. Greentarget Global LLC , Chicago, IL	369,200
19. Hunter , New York, NY	10,400,000	56. Beehive Strategic Communication , St. Paul, MN	359,456
20. Fahlgren Mortine (includes TURNER) , Columbus, OH	9,752,848	57. Otter PR , St. Petersburg, FL	354,652
21. Merritt Group , McLean, VA	8,619,763	58. Pugh & Tiller PR, LLC , Annapolis, MD	314,639
22. SourceCode Communications , New York, NY	8,588,700	59. Champion Management Group , Dallas, TX	312,948
23. Racepoint Global , Boston, MA	8,200,000	60. Bliss Group, The , New York, NY	305,283
24. LaunchSquad , San Francisco, CA	7,491,000	61. Rasky Partners, Inc. , Boston, MA	270,000
25. Lumina Communications , San Jose, CA	6,432,200	62. Montieth & Company , New York, NY	266,866
26. Touchdown PR , Austin, TX	6,227,591	63. BizCom Associates , Plano, TX	261,673
27. Padilla , Minneapolis, MN	5,744,091	64. Tunheim , Minneapolis, MN	227,193
28. Gregory FCA , Ardmore, PA	4,828,887	65. Zapwater Communications, Inc. , Chicago, IL	196,491
29. TruePoint Communications , Dallas, TX	4,229,964	66. O'Malley Hansen Communications , Chicago, IL	169,825
30. Raffetto Herman Strategic Comms. , Seattle, WA	4,197,973	67. Slide Nine Agency , Columbus, OH	132,595
31. Idea Grove , Dallas, TX	3,761,922	68. WordWrite Communications LLC , Pittsburgh, PA	121,650
32. Crenshaw Communications , New York, NY	3,687,430	69. MP&F Strategic Communications , Nashville, TN	97,105
33. Alloy , Atlanta, GA	3,292,710	70. Lavidge , Phoenix, AZ	57,000
34. Lansons , New York, NY	2,684,847	71. Milk & Honey PR , New York, NY	55,750
35. Trevelino/Keller , Atlanta, GA	2,600,000	72. Marketing Maven Public Relations , Camarillo, CA	37,409
36. Karbo Communications , San Francisco, CA	2,450,000	73. Lawlor Media Group , New York, NY	27,000
37. Peppercomm , New York, NY	1,851,788	74. Violet PR , Montclair, NJ	16,573

Fetterman conducts worst interview of all time

By Fraser P. Seitel

Quarterback Tom Brady is the G.O.A.T, the greatest of all time. Rappers Snoop Dogg and Tupac Shakur were O.G., original gangsta. And now, Pennsylvania senatorial candidate John Fetterman has merited the W.I.A.T., the worst interview of all time.



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*.

Fetterman is the Democrat Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania who suffered a debilitating stroke in May but has continued to press on against Republican Dr. Mehmet Oz in the battle to become Pennsylvania's next U.S. Senator.

In light of his illness, Fetterman has generally avoided such traditional campaign activities as public debates or addressing large crowds or even sitting for media interviews. And the strategy was working well, as the candidate and his campaign led in the polls heading into the election.

And then, one day in October, with less than a month to go before the election, the Fetterman public relations brain trust decided to invite NBC News in for the candidate's first major one-on-one TV interview. It was, quite literally, the worst interview of all time.

Fetterman, dressed in his traditional hoodie sweatshirt, sat behind a desktop computer that relayed closed-caption questions in real-time from NBC News correspondent Dasha Burns, who sat immediately in front of him. Well, maybe not "real-time"—more like tape delay—as it took several silent seconds for the candidate to read and take in the questions and then compose halting, deliberative responses. The whole thing made for riveting, memorable television but was also grotesquely sad, unfortunate and, frankly, creepy.

In cueing up the interview, Burns even acknowledged to anchor Lester Holt, "In small talk before the interview, without captioning, it wasn't clear he understood our conversation."

The immediate impact of the Fetterman

interview was as head-scratching as it was damning. Of course, one had to feel great empathy for anyone in such a dreadful position, forced to face millions of gawking anonymous onlookers in the midst of recovering from a grave, near fatal illness.

But for students of public relations, the real question was how on earth could any professional communicator agree to—or worse, recommend—such a high-profile, publicly-embarrassing, election-ruining interview? Who was the public relations counselor who decided that the candidate should commit network hara-kiri? The name of Fetterman's public relations advisor was ... of little consequence. Whoever it was, they concluded—for better or more likely worse—that it made sense for the candidate to take the risk of the interview.

What's important for every public relations counselor is to examine the genesis of the decision to accept the interview and, specifically, consider the questions that every communications advisor must ask him or herself before making such a momentous determination for a client.

First, what can we gain from such a high-profile interview?

With a month left till the election and Oz raising the heat on Fetterman to agree to at least one debate, the campaign felt increasing pressure to acquiesce. It's understandable that Fetterman's advisors, confident in their candidate's knowledge of the issues and his "just plain folks' demeanor"—especially compared to the elitist Dr. Oz—would be willing to risk one short interview with a "sympathetic" interviewer.

NBC, the consultants clearly felt, was, indeed, not only "sympathetic" to Fetterman, his principles and his predicament, but also "friendly" to his more progressive positions. Thus, again, the toe-in-the-water interview would be a risk worth taking.

Finally, the counselors reasoned that once Pennsylvania voters saw for themselves that Fetterman, afflicted as he clearly was with an illness, could nonetheless still think clearly, they would be reassured to give him their vote.

All of these factors likely weighed into the decision to allow the interview.

Second, what can we lose from such a high-profile interview?

On the other hand, exposing Fetterman to the one-on-one interview ran the risk of corroborating to undecided voters that this was a far more impeded candidate than they might have imagined.

Up until the NBC interview, as noted, the Fetterman campaign correctly kept the candidate out of the limelight, using proxy communications, rather than personal ones to illustrate who he was and what he stood for. Most Pennsylvanians had seen Fetterman only in TV and digital ads—\$4.4 million worth—most of which either featured supportive surrogates or highlighted Dr. Oz as a preening carpetbagger from New Jersey. Those few ads that did show the candidate in action pictured Fetterman walking tall, talking tough and looking vibrant.

That's why the real candidate's NBC interview "reintroduction" to the voting public was so jarring. This was clearly not the same confident, candid, robust bear of a man highlighted in campaign commercials.

"The emperor has no clothes," chided detractors. And even supporters—who fiercely defended the candidate's mental fitness—had to be dismayed.

Third, what's the worst thing that can happen from a bad interview?

This is the key question that every public relations counselor must ask in every public relations situation: "As a result of this that I'm suggesting, what is the worst thing that can happen?"

In this case, Fetterman's advisors failed to appreciate several unfortunate but inarguable facts about today's electorate.

1. In the 2020 presidential election, 3.4 million Pennsylvanians—nearly half the state—voted for Donald Trump. So, the margins between Democrats and Republicans were far too close to risk a last-minute public relations Hail Mary.

2. Fetterman's state support was already razor thin. Fetterman, in the best of times, was never an appealing candidate. Not only did he dress like a schlep—even Donald Trump had respect enough for the office to wear a suit and tie—but his work record was spotty and his background, like his opponent's, was privileged.

3. Americans in 2022 are visually oriented. They prefer Tik Tok and Instagram to newspapers and novels. They believe what they see rather than what they read. They're long on pictures and short on research. So, if they somebody who looks ill and acts differently, the image remains.

In other words, the recommendation to submit to the one-on-one NBC interview was the wrong public relations decision. And it just may be the crucial factor in why the Republicans will win the Pennsylvania senate race. ●

Business document retention rules and best practices

By Dominic Rovano

As more companies transition to a hybrid or even fully remote workplace, they're facing new challenges, opportunities and expectations inherent to these workplace models.



Dominic Rovano, CPA, is a Co-Partner in Charge of Janover LLC's New York City office. He leads the Professional Services group, and helps its clients satisfy their financial-reporting requirements successfully by providing assurance, tax and other advisory services.

Many businesses are downsizing their office spaces and relying on digital and cloud technology. As they do so, they're realizing they don't have the space, time or interest in storing and filing every piece of paperwork related to their business. Companies that require extra building space to store documents should consider cutting down on paper documentation to save money or figure out how to use it creatively for their employees. However, there are

specific documents that business owners are required to retain, including tax, legal and personnel records. This topic can be confusing and complex, especially as guidelines can vary based on industry, circumstance and state. It's best to follow guidelines specific to your situation while establishing a document retention policy for all other documents, including ones that don't fit into the categories mentioned below.

Document retention general guidelines

While most document retention guidance tends to be more best practice than official, there are some documents that are accompanied by specific document retention guidelines. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce recommends retention policies for the following documents:

Tax returns: Business tax returns should be kept for three to seven years, depending on your situation. You should retain federal tax returns and payroll tax records for seven years, to be safe. You should also keep IRS adjustments and sales and use tax returns permanently. Additionally, you must keep your records that support an item of income, deduction or credit shown on your tax return until the period of limitations for that tax return runs out. The period of lim-

itations is the period of time in which you can amend your tax return to claim a credit or refund, or the IRS can assess additional tax. Typically, this is three years and no more than seven.

Legal documents: Keep legal documents including bills of sale, business formation records, deeds, patents and trademark registrations, property appraisals and other ownership documents indefinitely.

Accounting records: Retain all accounting records that apply to your taxes, including depreciation schedules and year-end financial statements, for at least seven years or indefinitely.

Personnel records: The document retention guidance for personnel depends on the subject matter. Refer to this chart for more information.

Payroll information: You are required by the FLSA to retain payroll documents for at least three years.

Insurance, permits and licenses: Keep documentation for insurance, permits and licenses until you receive updated policy documents.

Bank statements: Your business banking, credit card and investment statements should be kept for at least seven years.

Hiring and employment records: Retain hiring and other records for at least one year. This includes resumes, applications, job ads and more.

Implementing document retention policy

Whether you're accustomed to storing your business documents digitally or physically, implementing a document retention policy in your workplace can help you quickly decide which documents to

keep and for how long. Identify what types of documents you possess and the level of importance they have for your business. Retaining all critical business documents, including the ones listed above, for the recommended period is the best practice. Decide which other documents are important to keep and for how long. Documents that aren't as crucial can be stored as digital files to save space.

The process for saving your documentation is also important to determine. You probably receive much of your documentation via email—immediately downloading and saving your digital files in a dedicated place on your computer can help you stay organized and avoid searching your inbox for documents. As recommended by Consumer Reports, digital copies should be stored in a password-protected electronic file, on a password-protected external hard drive or in the cloud (be sure it's encrypted to protect your data). Important paper records should be stored in a fireproof safe or safety deposit box. Even if you're more inclined to save paper copies, saving electronic copies can provide the necessary backup.

While there are many varying opinions for document retention policies, it's best to figure out what works best for your unique situation. Keep official business records for the recommended period, while creating a policy that classifies and specifies retention practices for all other documents. A precise and intentional plan that you and your employees can quickly refer to will help you stay organized, prepared and in compliance. ○

Pitch rates improved in Q3 2022

The number of PR pitches that got a response from journalists improved slightly in 2022's third quarter, but continue to be down overall from years prior, according to the Propel Media Barometer.

Propel's quarterly report, which analyzes media pitches and their response rate, found that journalists responded to an average of 3.35 percent of the pitches they received in 2022's third quarter, which is 0.10 percent higher than the 3.25 percent average that reporters responded to in Q2 but still a 1.27 percent decline from the same period in 2020.

Pitching response rates have continued to slide since 2020. For comparison: The average journalist response rate was 3.53 percent in Q2 2021, 3.37 percent in Q1 2022 and

38.81 percent in Q1 2020.

Reporters opened an average of 40.28 percent of the pitches they received in Q3, according to the report, also slightly up from Q2's average open rate (37.78 percent) as well as Q1's (36 percent) average open rate. Journalists opened the majority of pitches they received within the first hour (55.92 percent), although 12.5 percent weren't opened for several days.

The report suggests that if a journalist is interested in a story, chances are they'll respond quickly. Most responses from journalists (58.66 percent) occurred within the first four hours after they received the pitch, and most stories that were published appeared within three days. After day three, however, there's less than a 12 percent chance that PR pros will receive a response. ○

SEC nabs Kardashian for promotion

The Securities and Exchange Commission announced charges against Kim Kardashian for promoting an EthereumMax crypto asset security on her Instagram account without disclosing that she received a \$250,000 payment for the plug.

She agreed to settle the charges, paying \$1.26 million in penalties and cooperating with the SEC's ongoing investigation.

Kardashian posted about EMAX tokens and published a link to the EthereumMax website, which provided instructions for potential investors to purchase EMAX tokens.

"This case is a reminder that, when celebrities or influencers endorse investment opportunities, including crypto-asset securities, it doesn't mean that those investment products are right for all investors," SEC Chair Gary Gensler said in a statement. "Kardashian's case also serves as a reminder to celebrities and others that the law requires them to disclose to the public when and how much they are paid to promote investing in securities."

The SEC found that Kardashian violated the anti-touting provision of the federal securities laws. Without admitting or denying the SEC's findings, her payment breaks down as \$260,000 in disgorgement, which represents her promotional payment, plus prejudgment interest and a \$1 million fine.

Kardashian also agreed not to promote any crypto asset securities for three years.

Gensler today published a video warning investors not to make investment decisions based solely on the recommendations of a celebrity or influencer. ○



Kim Kardashian

Public Policy Holding acquires KP Public Affairs

Public Policy Holding Company, owner of Seven Letter, Crossroads Strategies, Alpine Partners, O'Neill & Associates and Forbes Tate PA shops, is acquiring KP Public Affairs in Sacramento for a maximum outlay of \$35 million.

It's the first major deal for PPHC since it went public on the London Stock Exchange in December 2021 and marks the initial foray into the California lobbying, PA and government relations arena.

Stewart Hall, CEO of PPHC, said the transaction delivers on the strategy to broaden the firm's reach into key state capitals and deepen its expertise in areas such as technology, renewable energy and natural resources.

Founded in 1996, KP has 31 professional staffers. It generated revenues of \$10.9 million during 2021 and chalked up \$3.2 million in pretax profit.

PPHC will initially shell out a payment of \$11.4 million, of which 90 percent will be cash and 10 percent stock for KP.

Future cash/stock payments are based on KP's profit growth through December 2026.

The Stevens Group represented KP in the transaction. ○

Mexico targets gun flow from U.S.

Mexico is working with the D.C.-based Global Action on Gun Violence to push for "impactful gun violence prevention strategies" in the U.S.



The primary focus is to curb the flow of American-made guns to Mexico.

Mexico has the world's fifth-largest number of unregistered guns in civilian hands, according to a September report from the Arms Control Association.

Gun violence is endemic in Mexico and impacts its agricultural, tourism, transportation and investment sectors.

The US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reports that 70 percent of firearms seized at Mexico crime scenes came from the U.S.

Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates more than \$250 million in guns were trafficked from the US in 2021.

GAGV is to handle outreach to federal, state and/or local government officials, participate in forums, and publish reports, fact sheets and other public-facing communications regarding gun violence prevention.

A federal court in Boston last month threw out Mexico's \$10 billion suit against American gun makers that charged them with reckless business practices that enabled the flow of guns to Mexico, leading to thousands of deaths.

Mexico has promised to appeal the decision. ○

BGR picks up Transamerica

BGR Government Affairs is providing strategic counsel and advocacy services to insurer Transamerica Cos. on issues related to retirement products.

The Baltimore-based company unveiled a new program on Oct. 13 that waives administrative and participant fees on employee retirement and health plans for small businesses.

Maya Seiden, co-head of BGR's international and trade practice, and Andy Lewin, co-head of the financial services group, handle the Transamerica account.

She worked in the Clinton and Obama administrations and was VP of Strategy and Business Development at BlackRock before joining BGR.

He was Legislative Director for Rep. Max Sandlin (D-TX) and Assistant VP for Government and Industry Affairs at Zurich Financial Services.

Transamerica is owned by Netherlands-based Aegon plc.

In September, Transamerica named Maurice Perkins its first corporate affairs officer to advance thought leadership, global government affairs, corporate communications and brand engagement.

Based in D.C., Perkins reports to Transamerica CEO Will Fuller and Aegon general counsel Onno van Klinken. ○

Turks and Caicos calls in FGS Global for crisis work

The Government of Turks and Caicos Islands has hired FGS Global for the development of a crisis management strategy to reduce the “reputational impact” suffered from a wave of violence that has rocked the Caribbean archipelago of 58,000 people since September.

There have been 15 fatal shootings since early last month, including Kent Carter, first VP of the NAACP Arlington branch.

The vacationing Carter was shot on Oct. 2 after a gunman fired into his vehicle. Another passenger also was murdered, and three others were injured.

The UK Royal Navy sent a ship with specialized police to TCI on Oct. 2 to help deal with the gang violence brought on by drug trafficking, turf wars and retribution, according to the Associated Press. TCI is a British overseas territory.

The WPP unit will respond to “requests to mitigate negative impressions as a result of a recent tourist incident and preceding and ongoing incidents of violence in the Turks and Caicos Islands.”

The objective of FGS Global’s engagement is to “help the island’s leaders maintain the reputation of the island as a safe, secure resort destination.” It’s responsible for crisis counseling, reputation management and media relations assistance, including writing and distributing statements to North American, Canadian, Caribbean and ethnic press.

The firm prepared remarks for TCI premier Washington Misick and other leaders regarding police investigations and steps to address the mayhem.

FGS Global began work for T&C on Oct. 5. The one-month agreement carries a fee of \$42,000. ○

Actum promotes U.S./Turkey trade

The Turkey-US Business Council has hired Actum to enhance trade and investment between the two nations.

Actum will handle outreach to state and federal officials under the one-year contract worth \$250,000. The Turkey-US Business Council operates under the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey.

Kirill Goncharenko, who was previously Founding Partner at Mercury Public Affairs and is Managing Partner at Actum, said the firm is targeting clients looking for “large, meaningful and measurable outcomes at the intersection of politics, media, business and government.”

Morris Reid, Actum’s Partner, spearheads the firm’s Turkey-U.S. Business Council team. ○

South Korea enlists Qorvis

South Korea has hired Qorvis to handle PR, strategic communications and media management services. The Publicis Groupe unit has a five-month contract valued at \$175,000.

Qorvis CEO Michael Petruzzello and Senior VP Brad Klapper are among the six-member Korea team. The firm reports to Chang Woo Lee, first Secretary at Korea’s D.C. embassy.

South Korea scrambled jets on Oct. 13 after North Korean warplanes flew close to the demilitarized zone between the countries. The regime of Kim Jong Un, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary, launched a ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan on Oct. 14. It has launched more than 40 missiles this year.

Kim has declared that North Korea’s nuclear forces are fully prepared for “actual war.” ○

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.

Foster Garvey PC, Washington, D.C., **registered Sept. 23, 2022 for Global Guardian Trust**, Tokyo, Japan, concerning providing analysis and monitoring services with respect to the U.S. fisheries industry, and congressional, administrative, and judicial actions of the U.S. government affecting U.S. or foreign fisheries industry, of interest to the Japanese fisheries industry and Japanese government regulators.

Holland & Knight, Tampa, Fla., **registered Oct. 4, 2022 for The Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas**, Nassau, Bahamas, regarding advocating the foreign principal’s interest before the Executive and Legislative branches, assisting in seeking funding from the United States related to hurricane disaster relief, COVID, and climate change, and opportunities related to the U.S. Dept. of Defense.

Nuclear Waste Management Organization, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, **registered Oct. 14, 2022 for itself** regarding communicating with U.S. government officials, U.S. media representatives, U.S. think tanks and other U.S. stakeholders about NWMO and its work.

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.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 14, 2022 for Crypto Council for Innovation**, San Francisco, Calif., regarding issues related to cryptocurrency legislation.

Salt Point Strategies, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 20, 2022 for Amazon Corporate, LLC**, Washington, D.C., concerning issues related to uncensored spectrum allocations, non-geosynchronous satellite constellations, and consumer technology devices.

Summit Public Affairs, Woodbury, TN, **registered Oct. 13, 2022 for City of Memphis**, Memphis, Tenn., regarding federal legislative and regulatory issues affecting the City of Memphis, including state and local funding opportunities.

Tai Ginsberg & Assocs., LLC, Washington, D.C., **registered Oct. 20, 2022 for Canadian National Railway Co.**, Washington, D.C., regarding post-enactment issues from the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act, including railroad regulation and safety provisions.

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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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Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts
Newport Beach & Company
Rancho La Puerta
Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa
Regent Seven Seas Cruises (project work)
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A person stands in the center of a large, dark doorway, looking out at a bright, sunlit sky with a few clouds. The light from the sky creates a strong glow and lens flare effect, illuminating the person and the floor of the doorway. The walls of the doorway are dark and textured.

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