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# O'Dwyer's

Communications & New Media

Oct. 2020 | Vol. 34 No. 6

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Health PR in a pandemic

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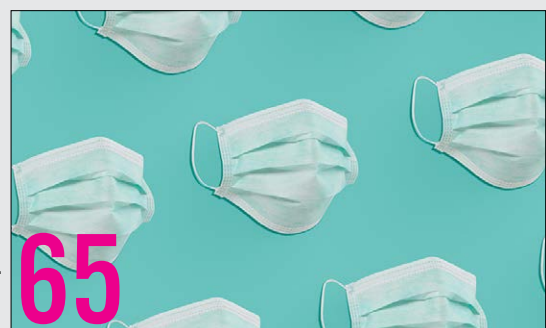
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November: Technology & Social Media

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# Twilight of the idiots

**A**dmit it: this probably wasn't the October surprise you envisioned. There's an appreciable irony in the news that President Trump and First Lady Melania—as well as Kellyanne Conway, Hope Hicks, Chris Christie and a veritable clown car of Trump notables—had tested positive for COVID-19. But I can't help but feel this might also be the development that shuts down the circus for good.

Call it karma, call it poetic justice. One thing's for sure: It's impossible to quantify at present how this unforeseen turn of events will affect Trump's re-election (you're wrong if you think Donny's diagnosis automatically seals the deal for Joe Biden). On the other hand, it's not controversial to surmise that, with only a month out until Election Day, this turn of events has dumped cold water on Trump's campaign, given in-person rallies and debates have been put on hold during the final stretch of a race for which poll after poll indicates he's losing.

Worse, Trump is now personally responsible for seeing the national conversation return to a crisis he pretended wasn't real (How exactly do you contract a "hoax" that "affects virtually nobody" and "will be gone by Easter" anyway?). It's cringeworthy enough to get the "China Virus" days after ridiculing Biden for wearing a mask; falling victim to a pandemic he downplayed for months undercuts critical elements of his reelection message: it exposes his mishandling of the virus, confirms the country remains in uncertain territory and reinforces the notion that he's failed to address a disaster that's killed more than 200,000 Americans. Four more years, anyone?

Trump re-wrote the election playbook. He galvanized a populist movement by addressing the grievances of a sizable portion of the electorate who hadn't been represented in election cycles for decades. He proved that emotions matter more than metrics in politics, that you need to go where the energy is—something Biden still needs to figure out—essentially running on a promise to return America to halcyon days that never really existed. And until COVID happened, when the economy was booming and unemployment was under four percent, it was beyond clear that he'd clobber Biden in a general election and waltz into a second term.

Politics always distorts reality to a degree, but Trump's supporters live in a special kind of fantasy world. Again, this speaks to his persuasiveness. Trump's a con man who's arguably the least capable and most incompetent American president in history, but I'll be damned if he doesn't know how to hook an audience, develop a product and sell it to the hilt. And for four years, the rest of us have been waiting for the spell to break, for the Trump cargo cult to arrive at a nadir, some moral bottom that doesn't exist. Virtually every month since he announced his candidacy five years ago, there's been another bridge too far, another "he really did it this time" moment. And yet nothing seemed to give. The lies, the bullying, the name calling, the conspiracy theories, the idiotic tweets. It didn't matter that he cheated on his taxes or cheated on his wives or cheated his way out of Vietnam. It didn't matter that he courted white supremacists or kept migrant kids in cages or cozied up to dictators or referred to soldiers as "losers" and "suckers." The most fascinating thing about the Trump era is that it has put into focus a phenomenon that essentially amounts to a willful denial of reality when you finally get what you want after being on the losing side of the culture wars for three decades. It isn't unlike the psychology of abusive relationships: make me feel wanted, and I'll excuse any behavior you throw at me. Trump's recklessness, boorishness and callousness are recast as instances of craft. Years of consecutive financial losses are somehow the makings of a shrewd businessman. Anytime he makes an absurd statement—like advocating injecting disinfectant to kill the coronavirus—he's somehow both making a medically-sound claim and telling a joke at the same time. The "us versus them" mindset in our political discourse has reached such dizzying heights that we now reside in a sort of quasi-parodic "Black Mirror" episode where everyone gets their own personalized confabulation of reality. His supporters endorse the tortuous logic that something is true only when you want to believe it. What's wrong for everyone else is fine when our camp does it. The loudest voice in the room wins.

And now, after nearly four years of incompetency, philistinism and science denial, this comedy of errors has arrived at an inevitable—albeit unexpected—conclusion: Trump has contracted a disease many of his followers didn't even believe existed. It's a stunning development, not only due to the fact that Trump's own diagnosis lays bare his mishandling of the pandemic, but because for the first time, he and his supporters have finally been forced to contend with reality.

Trump has become a victim of his own failures. He's now been placed in the unenviable position of showing by example what happens when you know the risks but ignore the science and refuse to take the proper precautions. The illusion has failed, or as Trump said himself: "it is what it is." ○

—Jon Gingerich

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# COVID-19 pandemic hits health insurance

The rate of uninsured Americans is on the rise in the wake of the pandemic, and a new survey from Finn Partners finds that Black Americans and young people are the hardest-hit groups.

By Steve Barnes

**H**ealth insurance coverage is taking a hit due to COVID-19, and the loss of coverage is coming down hardest on Black Americans and young people, according to a new survey from Finn Partners.

“The State of Health Insurance in COVID-19 America,” which was conducted by Civis Analytics, surveyed U.S. adults in February, June and September. It found that the rate of uninsured Americans rose 2.7 percent (to 14.7 percent) between February and September, adding 6.7 million people to the ranks of the uninsured.

For Black Americans the rise in the uninsured rate was much steeper, going from 17 percent in February to 26 percent in September. White Americans saw only a one percent jump, from 11 to 12 percent, in the same period.

The highest uninsured rate (27 percent)

was found among people between 18 and 26, and those without a high school diploma.

Respondents to the September survey said that a big part of the overall jump in the number of uninsured Americans was caused by the pandemic. While eight percent of white respondents said that COVID-19 was behind their loss of insurance, that number rises to 10.4 percent for Black respondents. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of Black respondents who had lost their coverage due to COVID-19 remain uninsured.

Perhaps even more disturbing, many people who have lost their coverage say they are not making any plans to replace it. Almost half (46 percent) of currently uninsured respondents said they were not planning to purchase health insurance this year, up significantly from the 33 percent who said the same thing in February.

Most of those who remain insured (76 percent) said they have no plans to change their current coverage. That number was slightly lower for those who considered themselves to be in excellent health (65 percent) or poor health (72 percent).

When it comes to what they are looking for in a health insurance plan, a majority of respondents (62 percent) said that affordability was a “very important” factor, with 52 percent saying that services and drugs covered, and being to see their preferred providers were major considerations.

“These Civis survey data lay bare the far-reaching impacts of systemic racism in America—and the consequences of an insurance system tied to employment,” said Gil Bashe, Managing Director of Finn’s global health practice. “COVID-19’s racial impacts are not confined to medical challenges. The pandemic is making it more difficult for people of color to continue to work and, as a result of those job losses, to retain the security that health insurance provides, which enables people to access preventive medical care.”

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# COVID-19 response batters U.S. image overseas

The Trump administration's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic has battered America's image around the world, according to the Pew Research Center.

By Kevin McCauley

According to a recent report by the Pew Research Center, the Trump administration's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic has left the United States' reputation in tatters.

The Center's Sept. 15 survey of 13 allied and partner nations finds the share of the public with a positive view of America is as low as it has been at any point since it began polling on this topic about 20 years ago.

Only 41 percent of the British people have a favorable view of the U.S., while France's 31 percent rating matches that of March 2003, which was at the height of U.S.-France tensions due to the Iraq War. A little more than a quarter (26 percent) of Germans have a positive view of the US.

The U.S. mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic is a major reason for the declining image, according to Pew.

The Japanese (25 percent) top the list when it comes to "confidence in Trump."

Australia is next at 23 percent followed by Canada (20 percent), UK (19 percent), Netherlands (18 percent), South Korea (17 percent), Spain and Italy (16 percent), Sweden (15 percent), France (11 percent), Germany & Denmark (10 percent) and Belgium (9 percent).

Pew found that Trump is less trusted than the leaders of Germany, France, UK, Russia and China. Only 16 percent of the survey respondents believe Trump "would do the right thing regarding world affairs," compared to 83 percent who expressed no confidence in the US president to do the right thing.

Germany's Angela Merkel has the highest marks as 76 percent of those polled have confidence in her while 19 percent have no confidence.

France's Emmanuel Macron (64 percent, 32 percent), UK's Boris Johnson (46 percent, 46 percent), Russia's Vladimir Putin (23 percent, 73 percent) and China's Xi Jin-

ping (19 percent, 78 percent) rank next in the confidence/no confidence ratings.

Pew also polled Americans on Trump's handling of COVID-19 messaging and gave him poor marks.

Nearly six-in-ten (57 percent) believe Trump has been delivering the wrong message about the pandemic and two-thirds say his administration "only sometimes or hardly ever gets the facts right about the outbreak."

Americans consider the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health organizations the most trusted source when it comes to COVID-19. Fifty-seven percent of Pew's respondents say they get it right either most or almost all of the time.

Local media (47 percent), governors (46 percent), news media in general (40 percent), friends/family (28 percent) and Trump and his administration (27 percent) rank next. ○

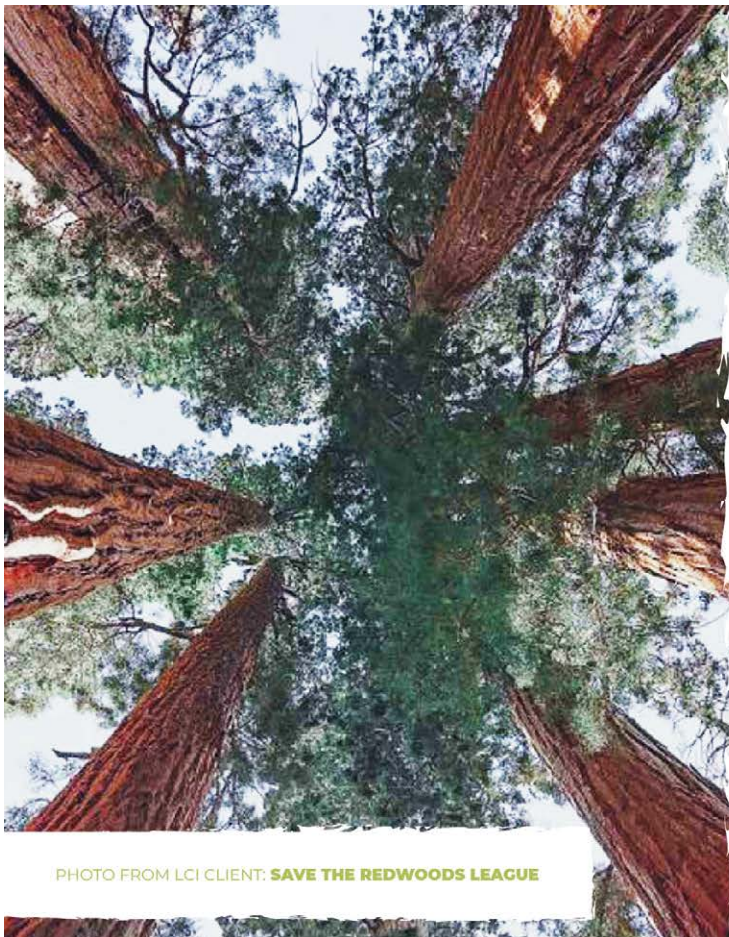


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# Pharma marketing's high-stakes moment

Now is the time to forge connections with the audiences that matter most.

By Sarah Fox

**T**he pandemic has disrupted every facet of life, making many things more complicated and others more apparent than ever. For pharma, this is a unique inflection point.

For many companies, the path forward will largely depend on how well they consider and connect with the audiences that matter most. And the best connections come from a place of purpose and honesty.

But connections aren't easy in this volatile landscape. And for those tasked with advancing COVID-19 therapeutics and vaccines, the scrutiny makes the stakes higher than ever.

Some pharma companies will rise to the occasion. They'll emerge with a stronger vision and purpose as well as new influence and growth opportunities. And perhaps something even more valuable: a clearer understanding of who they are and how they matter. This is a chance to transcend the transactional, to make a personal impact with a human touch.

Today, longtime competitors have set aside their rivalries and pledged their common commitment to public health in a unified, reputation-raising effort for the entire industry. Some are even open sourcing their proprietary data, while others are donating product to the cause.

These magnanimous efforts could hasten a therapeutic or preventive intervention for COVID-19 and help spare countless lives while reinvigorating the economy.

The industry's unified efforts to address the pandemic—to battle a global existential threat—has the potential to galvanize company reputations and burnish their brands. It could boost stock value and bolster patient and provider confidence in the ways they work to serve communities and address needs.

So, how can pharma companies best meet this singular moment? By genuinely acknowledging their audiences' angst, uncertainties—and hopes for the future. Whether they're employees, investors, patients, healthcare providers, research partners, suppliers, legislators or regulators.

Now, when everything from patient journeys to supply chains is scrambled, sure-footed, purpose-driven communication will carry the day, helping to navigate a path toward an unseen future that feels murkier than ever.

If you're charged with marketing or communication for a pharma company, now

is the time to step back and evaluate your current narrative for key audiences. Be sure that your communications approach remains relevant in this fluid environment, when a disease outbreak can upend everything.

Recognize that your stakeholders' world view has changed. Their priorities, values and attention spans have shifted. Yet they're still looking for guidance, assurance, answers and expertise.

If you're uncertain of your stakeholders' mindsets—or whether your messages are resonating—consider auditing your stakeholder communications, reassessing your messaging platforms or even conducting a perceptions survey.

In words and tone, platform and positioning, be intentional, authentic and compassionate. Focus on your audience's needs first and pay attention to how the pandemic is affecting them.

Here's how to think about connecting with three common stakeholder groups now.

## Show patient groups you care—credibly

Patients are suffering from whiplash. On one hand, they're traumatized by coronavirus casualties—and a host of health conditions that may—or may not—increase their individual risk. They seek comfort and reassurance, as well as acknowledgement of their distress over the pandemic.

Yet many are also delaying routine preventive care and vaccinations. The patient journey has always been complex, but now there are more nuances and variables, creating the need for tailored and focused communication strategies to reach different patient segments.

Complications have grown with COVID-19, with attention spans shorter, anxiety higher and the need for precise communications even greater. Now is the time to re-evaluate your approach to ensure that you're communicating authentically and with humanity.

To be authentic, aim for realism and honesty. Acknowledge that while the pandemic challenges all of us, patients must still pay attention to other health conditions and prioritize good health habits.

Share patient stories of inspiration and survival. These narratives will resonate strongly, especially if they reflect the struggles and imperfections of real people. Be sure your patients can see themselves in the patients you portray.

In addition, patients know a faceless organization or entity can't really care about them—but a relatable patient story, a caring medical officer or lab researcher can embody the compassion we all need. Let them know you're an organization of real people who share their concerns every day, especially in this moment.

## Connect with physician groups

Physicians and other healthcare providers juggle multiple roles every day. They have precious little time, and often, overlapping loyalties and pressures.

HCPs are at the front line of their patients' well-being and responsible for access to care.

They're also at the front line of the coronavirus pandemic.

They're beholden to their health system for its profitability and development, and worried about bringing routine care back to their medical settings, which has been disrupted by the pandemic. To stay afloat, they need to be on point for reimbursement. They're also expected to stay abreast of emerging science and studies.

Remember that, on top of these pressures, they're constantly bombarded with new data and emerging research from institutions and investigators. So, the easier your data is to read—and the more concise—the likelier your content will make an impression.

And instead of focusing on the numbers, focus on the insights from the data: how it can make their jobs easier and make their interactions with patients more productive.

## Woo the research community with stories

Amid the complexity of scientific exchange, it's easy to become fixated on data points. But using storytelling techniques to share your data can bring the main conclusions and takeaways to life.

All humans—yes, even highly analytical researchers—are wired to respond emotionally to stories. And stories make stats stickier.

Even simple narratives add context and purpose to data, transforming it from hypotheses, conclusions, figures and tables into a compelling case for new thinking and action.



Sarah Fox

Continued on page 21





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# In crises, health sector clients need to act

**Crises have a way of revealing character, and the twin 2020 crises of systemic racism and the COVID-19 pandemic have demanded that companies take action.**

**By Arielle Bernstein Pinsof, John Bianchi and Michael Heinley**

In America today, we face two looming crises: the pandemic and systemic racism. And though they may appear unrelated, they're closely interlinked. COVID-19 has hit those in poor health most severely; this means that Black and brown Americans—already less healthy, less well-paid, less securely employed and, consequently, less well-insured—bear the brunt of the coronavirus. According to Johns Hopkins, Black Americans are three times more likely to get COVID-19 than whites and twice as likely to die from it.

Americans' health—particularly in communities of color—is now under assault from COVID-19 on a different front. A survey released by Civis Analytics and Finn Partners revealed an estimated 6.7 million Americans lost their health coverage between February and September as a result of COVID-19-related unemployment, and that Black Americans face a disproportionate risk of being uninsured.

Civis' survey reported that while eight percent of Americans overall lost their health insurance coverage due to COVID-19, more than a quarter (26 percent) of Black Americans were uninsured by September, rising from 17 percent in February. Latinx Americans' uninsured rates also climbed, from 18 percent in February to 21 percent in September. In comparison, 11 percent of white Americans were uninsured in February, rising only slightly to 12 percent in September.

This loss of insurance leaves millions without access to healthcare in the midst of a global pandemic. What's more, many may not realize it. The number of people confused over whether or not they lost health insurance increased, from 2.2 percent in February to 3.5 percent in September—an additional 3.2 million people. Among those aware that they're uninsured, 46 percent now say they don't plan to purchase health insurance this year, a jump from 33 percent last February.

The numbers add up to reduced access to care when people need it most, exacerbating and laying bare the effects of systemic racism on our nation's and neighbors' health. The health sector has a responsibility to act, communicating with clarity so that people have the information they need. All players—whether product innovators, payers, or providers—must rally to their patient-care mission, backing up their good words with meaningful deeds.

As communicators, we must support actors throughout the health ecosystem to make changes that will help stem these growing threats to individual, national, and economic health, and especially to our health equity. Here are five approaches for us to consider when counseling our health-sector clients:

**Help patients stay on their meds:** With more than 10 million people estimated to lose their insurance coverage by year's end, according to 2020 research published by the Urban Institute, product developers must seriously consider ramping-up patient-assistance programs. Rebates, coupons, and providing needed drug products free of charge in the short term to those who have become uninsured can help keep people on their medications. The needs of those without insurance are pressing right now, especially for Black Americans, so there is no better time for drug companies to be good corporate citizens.

**Ensure open doors for the uninsured:** Hospital systems must marshal their public affairs divisions, intensifying efforts to help those who've lost their insurance. In this unprecedented emergency, hospitals can improve the health of local communities and aid in their economic recovery by offering free clinical care to those who have no job and no insurance; now is the time to be a good neighbor.

**Shift the fee model:** Payers need to consider how fee-for-service is failing our most vulnerable, and how they can support patients' immediate needs during this emergency, scaling up support for affordable care and moving to value-based care or primary care capitation. To stem confusion, they must also better educate subscribers so they understand their options for care. Approaches like these that increase affordability and access will help the millions of Americans who've become uninsured now and after the pandemic is over.

**Address mental health:** it's the epidemic within an epidemic. More than a third of Americans reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in July, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and National Center for Health Statistics, compared to about 11 percent in the first half of 2019, while ExpressScripts found prescriptions for anti-anxiety and insomnia medications and anti-depressants rose 21 percent in the first month of the pandemic. For many Black Americans,

anxiety stems from two sources—the pandemic and racially-motivated violence—yet they're less likely to seek help, according to the National Council for Behavioral Health. Our payer, provider and hospital clients can do much more here, lowering barriers to care for Black Americans, especially those who have lost insurance, and investing in community-based public health education to reduce stigma associated with mental-health needs.

**Close the digital divide:** COVID-19 drove widespread adoption of telehealth, shifting the healthcare mindset to digital, and while McKinsey estimates a rise in telemedicine use from 11 percent in 2019 to 46 percent this year, many who could benefit most are too often left out. Many telehealth programmers assume patients have digital literacy or speak English, which isn't always true. There's a digital divide; and to close it, we must urge our hospital and provider group clients offering virtual care to support patients with loaner smartphones and tablets, better interpreters and digital education to ensure access. We must urge payer clients to reimburse digital appointments at the same rates as in-person visits.

Now's the time to think creatively, engage thoughtfully and act with purpose for a "patient-centered" industry to communicate with patients who need help. These and other health-sector responses must be undertaken genuinely; not because they'll boost reputation, but because, as gatekeepers to and providers of care, we have a responsibility to help. We must do it because it's right. In adversity, our true natures shine through. This isn't the case only with people, but with companies as well. Right now, the twin crises of the pandemic and systemic racism require companies to act. As communicators, we must counsel our client partners to do so with responsibility and humanity.

*Arielle Bernstein Pinsof is Partner, John Bianchi is Vice President and Michael Heinley is Senior Partner at Finn Partners. ○*



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# Shifting healthcare communications strategies

**Failure to stay relevant is a catastrophe for PR professionals, but in the chaotic and uncertain COVID-19 era, keeping organizations and clients relevant has become the primary determinant of success.**

By Sharon Reis

For all of us, not just those in healthcare communications, this has been a year of chaos. We were forced to repeatedly adapt to a rapidly changing environment and continually learn unexpected lessons for moving forward in this bewildering new reality.

We were pushed to constantly reevaluate messaging and positioning to demonstrate engagement and sensitivity to the COVID-19 crisis. For every news story, social post, speech and product, PR professionals needed to take daily and weekly checks on the environment to figure out when and how it was appropriate to step in and step up.

**As a healthcare PR agency, our first priority in this tumultuous time is taking care of our team.** The only way we can serve our clients well is if we first take care of ourselves. For our team, self-care is no longer a luxury. It's a survival mechanism. When the federal Emergency Declaration hit, we abandoned our Washington, D.C. office and went fully remote. It was a seamless transition because we already offered our team members "Work-from-Home Fridays." It was our best answer for telework. When we opened our small, woman-owned business four years ago, we started working remotely once a week on the day of your choice. But that became too confusing; some people would take it, others would not. It got to the point where we didn't know whether someone was in or out of the office. Our solution was giving everyone the benefit of Fridays at home, with the requirement to use video calls as the primary form of communication. Did that ever pay off when the coronavirus hit!

I remember reading a post on Instagram that said, "We are in a crisis ... and working remotely." To help our own staff practice self-care, take time to nurture their mental health and figure out their new life, we immediately activated our annual summer hours program several months early: Everyone takes a day off from work every other Friday. It gives all of us a time to reflect, recharge and reconnect with what matters to each of us personally. And the positive effects are felt professionally too.

We are clearly not the only ones who think this kind of respite is important: according to a recent Samueli Integrative Health survey, a majority (64 percent) of Americans

say they're focused on their mental health now more than ever.

**COVID-19 hit particularly hard for some of our primary clients, whose work missions put them on the frontlines of the pandemic.** Key client concerns shifted instantly and strongly to anything and everything COVID: safety and personal protective equipment, clinician burnout, the surge in telehealth and teletherapy, the incredible impact of the social determinants of health, the no-visitor rules at care facilities, constantly changing care guidelines, patients forgoing care, postponed surgeries—and people dying.

**The media world changed too.** For a firm that prides itself on excelling in earned media relations and thought leadership, we needed to reconfigure how we shared our clients' perspectives. Consider the state of media during the first half of this year:

- Hundreds of journalists were laid off at Vice, Quartz, *The Economist*, BuzzFeed, Condé Nast and elsewhere.

- According to the *New York Times*, nearly 40,000 employees of news media companies were furloughed, laid off or had their pay cut.

- COVID-19 has literally killed nearly 100 weekly and daily publications, bringing the total to roughly 1,800 news outlets that have just disappeared in the past decade.

Nonetheless, there was some good news about the news media:

- A Pew study found 69 percent of Americans approved of the media coverage of the pandemic.

- Other polls found that trust in broadcast and cable network news was growing; and

- Americans wanted science to guide our way out of this pandemic.

For our clients, in-person scientific meetings came to an abrupt halt. Now the virtual or hybrid annual meeting is here to stay. A recent issue of *Science* explored COVID-19's huge impact on annual scientific meetings. A human-centered artificial intelligence conference that typically draws 3,000 attendees switched to a virtual format. The result? The conference attracted more than 30,000 participants. The reported benefits included moderators more effectively screening questions and avoiding non-questions. The virtual meeting was more accessible and affordable. What do the meeting participants miss the most? In-person net-

working. Many organizations are trying to replicate that connection on social media but being in the presence of another human being is impossible to replace, although online platforms are still trying to figure it out.

For one of our in-person community-based campaigns, we shifted everything online and eliminated all printed materials. One of our clients was in the middle of testing a campaign focused on health and well-being, focused on reaching the underserved population in five pilot markets. The "TakeCare" project is all about the power that every one of us has to improve our own health and well-being. What makes this campaign different and exciting is the use of newly produced documentary film shorts with real



Sharon Reis

people taking small steps to make real changes in their lives. These films make emotional connections and inspire behavior change. Since we could no longer be in-market, we pivoted quickly to online. Within 30 days, we launched a digital micro-campaign within TakeCare, to specifically help people during COVID-19. We released five engaging film shorts that shared powerful stories of people who have transformed their health and well-being through small steps, and highlighting topics that were particularly relevant in the new environment: stress relief, building community, finding meaning and purpose.

Surveys and polls are more popular than ever for the news media. I've never seen so many polls covered in the news, posted on social media and written about by the trades, aside from election season. The abundance of survey findings tells us two things. First, they work. Second, they provide clients an opportunity to stay relevant, if you can find something newsworthy to add.

What are we looking at in 2021 for healthcare PR? We'll continue to operate in a chaotic and uncertain environment. Trying to make meaningful personal connections virtually will be essential. Microtargeting on a single platform is a must, and our clients will need science and new data to remain a vital part of the national conversation. Welcome to the new normal!

As the saying goes, "there's wisdom and freedom in accepting that we don't have all the answers." While we're figuring those answers out, we must strive to find ways to keep our organizations and clients relevant.

Sharon Reis is Principal of The Reis Group. ○





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# Maybe doctors will save us all

Physicians in recent years have begun leveraging social media platforms for social and political advocacy work. Here's why PR pros should embrace this emerging trend.

By Ken Deutsch and Julie Strack

**W**e're living in a social climate where life-and-death topics are divisive and politicized, including strategies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and address health disparities. At the same time, we're surrounded by more bad information than ever before.

Experts on the frontlines of our nation's health crises are quickly adapting to the moment. Many physicians are becoming increasingly savvy about working through social and traditional media platforms to put scientific and patient-focused perspectives at the center of discussion.

## That was then

For 10 years, JPA Health has been tracking how health professionals engage among themselves and with others online through GRETEL, our proprietary insights platform. In the past, it was commonplace to see health professionals using social media—in a professional capacity—limit their posts to their area of expertise.

However, once in a while, these providers might address political and social issues ranging from disparities in care to sexism in their profession. However, when we looked at patterns in the use of specific keywords and hashtags, we found that topics directly related to medical specialties (i.e., oncology, surgery) outpaced discussions on general social issues.

This started to shift two years ago, and the trend has dramatically accelerated in 2020.

Today, physicians are discussing social issues more frequently than issues directly related to their medical specialties. They're frequently discussing topics related to both public health and social justice, including advocacy for research-based measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, support for Black Lives Matter and visibility of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on underserved communities.

This trend began to emerge two years before the COVID-19 pandemic, when physicians propelled their perspectives to the center of the national conversation on gun safety. In a November 2018 tweet, the National Rifle Association stated that “doctors [should] stay in their lane [on gun control],” sparking an outpouring of posts from physicians on how they witness the effects of gun violence as healthcare providers. Physicians drew wide attention to the issue of gun safety and positioned themselves as

influential advocates. The discussion resulted in a viral hashtag, #ThisIsMyLane, which was widely shared by physicians in late 2018. For example, a prominent post leveraging this hashtag by Dr. Judy Melinek was retweeted more than 100,000 times and received more than 500,000 likes on Twitter. Dr. Melinek also authored an article on the topic for Vox, titled, “The NRA told doctors to ‘stay in your lane’ on guns. I’m a doctor. This is my lane.” Shortly thereafter, CNN covered the controversy.

## A year of crisis

The dramatic events of 2020 put this trend on fast-forward, as many healthcare professionals elevated their voices to advocate for health and equity in response to urgent and unprecedented challenges. In March 2020, medical professionals of every specialty commented on COVID-19 more frequently than topics within their specialty area or any other health issue. While the conversations started with the cancelling of medical conferences and support for healthcare workers directly impacted by COVID-19, the conversation shifted to amplify broader public health messaging around #FlattenTheCurve and calls for PPE production.

When discussions on measures to combat the pandemic on individual and systemic levels became politically divisive, healthcare professionals took leading roles in advocating for research-based public health measures, such as social distancing and wearing a face covering while in public. For example, following a statement from President Trump in March that he'd like to see the nation's businesses and churches open by Easter, physicians vocally pushed for continued social distancing to protect the public. The Council of Medical Specialty Societies, a coalition representing more than 800,000 physicians, authored a letter to the administration to “support travel and gathering restrictions to slow the transmission of coronavirus disease 2019.” Influential physicians also warned of negative health consequences in a host of top-tier print and broadcast media outlets.

In late May and early June, millions across the globe began to speak more vocally about issues related to race in the U.S. in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Healthcare professionals joined the conversation to advocate for social justice and health equity for Black communities.

In addition to discussions about race and policing related to Black Lives Matter, many influencers including physicians advanced parallel discussions on health equity. Statistics on the disproportionate loss of life from COVID-19 within underserved communities were frequently discussed alongside issues related to Black Lives Matter. Physicians amplified awareness of all these social justice issues and advocated for greater equity within healthcare systems. For example, data within JPA's GRETEL demonstrates that posts from medical professionals on #BlackLivesMatter were roughly equivalent in June to posts on their medical specialties.

## What happens next

Advocacy for political and social issues related to public health are likely to continue accelerating in the future. Many people across the nation, including physicians, increasingly understand the urgency of promoting sound science within public conversations.

But while interest in communicating is increasing among physicians and scientists, debates continue about the most effective ways to promote scientific information and avoid sharing content that either may intrude on patient privacy or sow further division.

For instance, some criticized #ThisIsMyLane social media posts—which contained images of gun violence—for being too graphic or triggering to some viewers, and for potentially violating patient privacy. Debates continue about the most effective ways to engage members of the public who have little trust in science and medicine on the importance of public health measures.

Communications professionals have an important role to play in these discussions. We have an opportunity to apply our expertise to best practices in scientific communications and partner with healthcare pro-



Ken Deutsch



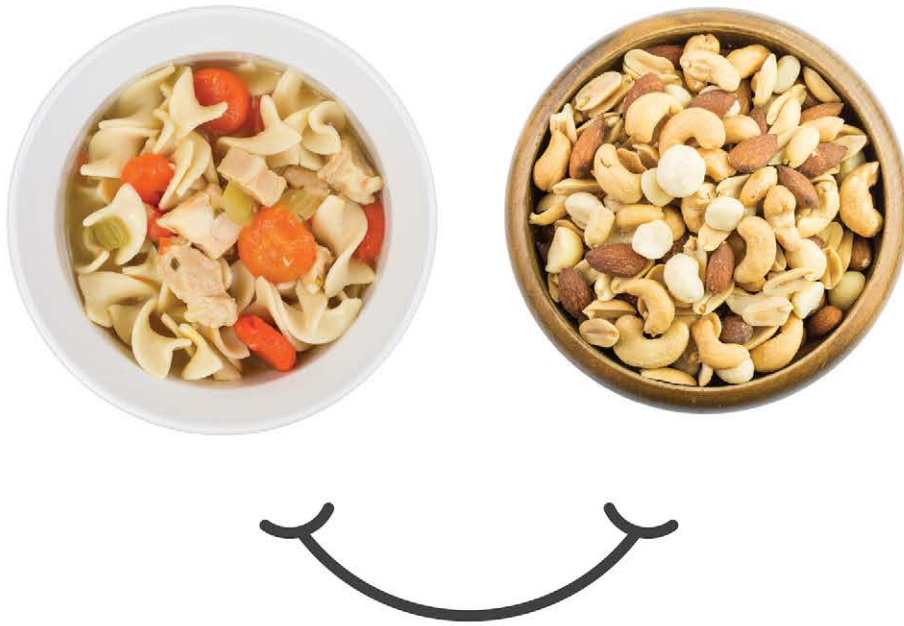
Julie Strack

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# Every day is a crisis: health comms. in a pandemic

Healthcare experts have an opportunity to lead during the COVID-19 crisis by sharing their expertise and perspectives across media channels.

By Thomas Graham and Dr. Vanila Singh

**D**uring a crisis, audiences aren't looking so much for someone to blame as they're looking for someone to take responsibility. They're also looking for someone to restore a sense of calm through offering reasoned, sensible solutions. This takes honesty, transparency, a firm grasp of the situational facts and leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic seemingly eschews such common-sense crisis communications advice. We're fighting a silent, relatively unknown adversary, a novel virus. Highly divided factions get mired down in political fighting about responsibility, which does more to arouse fear, anger and panic than abate it. That begets another crisis within a crisis.

As healthcare communications experts and healthcare leaders, what can you do to lead the public through this morass?

## Be a reliable, factual and reassuring source

Pay attention to the reporting from your local news outlets, and be prepared to weigh in with insights. Are there obvious medical and scientific holes you instinctively know could improve their reporting accuracy? Are they reporting anything in such a way that they are—perhaps and hopefully unwittingly—adding to the confusion and fear?

Make notes and prepare a succinct, fact-based statement to use in a pitch. By and large, news outlets want to get the story right. Don't assume another expert is lining up to correct them; many may have their sights set on larger audiences. You have the opportunity to be the calming voice that leads your community out of the chaos now. This can help you prepare and provide you with assets to take your expertise to a larger stage later.

## Stay in your lane of expertise—but relay it to COVID

Absolutely and under no circumstances should you portray yourself to be an expert in any field but that or those in which you are. This rule, however, is not as self-limiting as it may appear.

You don't have to be an epidemiologist or virologist to offer thoughtful, useful and science-based dialogue during this pandemic; you just need to relate your expertise to concerns associated with it. Many physicians can comment on various aspects of the COVID virus due to patient experience, training, specialties and expertise that may not be obvious, but in general:

- A pulmonologist can give advice on types of masks for those afflicted with chronic respiratory conditions.

- A pain management expert can give guidance and reassurance to those in chronic pain, advising them to stay in communications with their doctors, keep their prescriptions filled, and reach out for human contact if dealing with the pain in isolation starts to feel overwhelming.

- Pediatricians can counsel parents and guardians on practical back-to-school advice.

- Pharmacology experts can talk about the realities and myths of whether the season's flu shot is advantageous, or offer guidance to those who might be thinking about participating in a trial for a new COVID-19 vaccine.

- General physicians can offer guidance on possible contraindications with current medications and the increasing number of COVID-19 therapeutics, or provide travel advice to essential personnel, the traveling business population or holiday travelers.

- Mental health personnel can provide insight on the effects of prolonged social isolation and tips for caregivers and others concerned about the well-being of family members.

- Experts in medical technology can guide at-home patients on how to get the most out of telehealth—this is particularly important in those populations who aren't typically tech-savvy but find themselves limited to an option that, were it not available, could lead to dire consequences. Imagine being the person who can turn that tech-adverse apprehension into gratitude!

It may take some creativity and it will take research, but particularly in a pandemic such as this where so many population segments are affected, we can't think of a field of expertise that can't be tied back to an issue in this pandemic.

## Get media training

Bedside communication is a great building block for communicating to the media. Coming off as calm, compassionate, well-versed and articulate is necessary and effective. There are, however, two important considerations in this climate of crisis: The first is that we don't know what we don't know (still); and the second is the highly charged political environment.

**Ever-changing information.** The best way to deal with constantly changing and updated information is to admit it may

change. The practicalities of a novel virus are completely impractical in information dissemination, but that's why reasoned voices are so necessary. Consistently providing basic, practical information and aligning with expert health agency guidance keeps you in the realm of the national experts.

**Political environment.** This is where media training becomes more than just good advice—it's a necessity. A good media trainer will take the above advice about consistently aligning with the experts, and teach you how to bridge your messages away from politically charged questions back to what the audience really needs to know to stay safe and survive.

## Moving to the larger stage

When you feel comfortable with your skills and have some media assets—video and online clips—to leverage your experience, look for opportunities in regional and national media. This is more difficult, but it's also a crowded field of media talking about the same thing, which means every one of them needs a proven expert.

Remember, however, that not getting booked on a major network or cable show doesn't mean you can't increase your exposure. You now have a much larger captive online audience than existed a year ago. Use social media platforms. Participate in virtual panels and forums—and then share those on social media. Encourage your friends and peers to share—and share info from your peers, as well, to increase your thought leadership circle. Surrounding yourself with smart, successful people will eventually place you squarely in that realm.

## Patient communications

Finally, for those who are simply struggling with how to invoke all of this new information into their patient communications—all of this media training can help, certainly. Your expert calm, collected pres-



Thomas Graham



Dr. Vanila Singh

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# Building trust and combating vaccine misinformation

A call to action for health communicators amid an eroding confidence in public health agencies.

By Katherine M. Nicol

The World Health Organization named vaccine hesitancy—the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite available vaccines—one of the top 10 global health threats in 2019. At that time, the United States was experiencing an outbreak of measles, which had been declared eliminated from the U.S. in 2000, and the perpetuation of vaccine misinformation had reached a tipping point. Or so we thought. Then came COVID-19.

Today, in the midst of a global pandemic the likes of which haven't been seen in a century, in addition to vaccine hesitancy and misinformation we're experiencing a compounding public health crisis: that of Americans' eroding trust in our public health agencies. As we enter the fall and anticipate the risk of what many health experts are calling a "twindemic"—the possibility of a severe flu season coinciding with a surge in COVID-19 cases—vaccines have been politicized like never before and an unprecedented number of lives are at risk. While we await the arrival of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, we're faced with the looming reality that vaccines are only effective if people are actually vaccinated. We currently have a safe and effective influenza vaccine, but despite urgent pleas from the public health community, we're seeing a concerning increase in vaccine hesitancy among American adults. Add to that the plummeting rates of childhood vaccinations in recent months, which the American Academy of Pediatrics has described as a national emergency, putting children at risk for contracting life-threatening, yet preventable, diseases. Now more than ever, health communication has an essential place at the forefront of the national agenda.

As health communicators, we not only have the opportunity to play a critical role in addressing this unprecedented public health crisis, we have an absolute responsibility. What can we as health communicators—especially those of us working in the vaccination space—do to help stem the tide of vaccination misinformation and hesitancy and rebuild trust in our public health agencies and experts?

**Take an audience-centric approach.** No matter how creative dissemination strategies and tactics are, if a message doesn't resonate with the audience it won't be heard. Specific audience insights must be considered if we're going to tap into their motivations effectively to inform their immunization

attitudes and change behaviors. The time for formative research is now, so that we're prepared to immediately deliver not just clear and accurate, but also tailored messages when the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available. Another important element of the audience-centric approach is to identify meaningful opportunities to engage with audiences more directly. Public health agencies can and should leverage targeted media and related platforms to engage more directly with the American public in sharing potentially life-saving vaccine information.

**Translate the science.** As Paul Offit, MD, director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia often states, science doesn't speak for itself. As noted in his book, *Bad Advice*, "Scientists are often unable to package their insights into the neat narratives that the public requires." As health communicators, we're by nature, communicators of science. As such, our role must include effectively and accurately translating complex scientific, regulatory, and medical information into clear, plain-language content that our audiences can comprehend. Given the misperceptions that exist around vaccines, it's vital that all vaccine-related messages and materials deliver clear, science-based information in a manner that is both credible and relevant to specific audience segments.

Research published in the journal *Human Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics* finds that when it comes to combating vaccine misinformation among vaccine-hesitant audiences, it may also be worthwhile for clinicians and health communicators to consider implementing "storytelling"—i.e., communicating science through the lens of compelling and personally relevant experiences and narratives. Coupled with and based on credible, fact-based vaccine information, storytelling can be an effective tool for engaging vaccine hesitant audiences. In the vaccination space in particular, it can be challenging to balance the depiction of the emotional elements experienced by the subject of the story with the most important, evidence-based information that is at the core of the call to action. This can, however, be carried out in effective ways when, for example, pediatricians who are also parents share personal stories about vaccinating their own children and clinicians share anecdotal narratives about cases of vaccine-preventable disease that they

have observed during their careers. Incorporating storytelling into health communications with vaccine hesitant individuals, in a non-threatening and non-judgmental manner, can be an effective way to increase and normalize conversations about vaccines and, ultimately, inform attitudes and change behavior.

## Use trusted sources to deliver the message.

Science that's clearly and accurately translated, including evidence-based storytelling, is further amplified by credible and trusted messengers. Given the complex landscape and perceptions that surround vaccination, now more than ever, it's imperative that the channels and messengers chosen to communicate and disseminate messaging invoke a high level of credibility among target audiences. Highly credible sources that are trusted by audiences will increase the likelihood that the messages they deliver will be attended to, understood, and internalized as true, versus dismissed as unbelievable. The audience must trust the source delivering that message, be it an entity or an expert.

According to WHO, "... health workers, especially those in communities, remain the most trusted advisor and influencer of vaccination decisions." As health communicators, we have a responsibility to engage and include clinicians and health workers in our strategic planning and to provide them with clear, science-based, credible information to deliver to their patients. In doing so, we can indirectly begin to rebuild public trust in our national health agencies as the source of overarching guidance, scientific information and public health leadership for those already trusted sources at the local and community levels. Messengers should also span both public and private sectors. Research emphasizes the need for science communicators to bridge the gap between science and society.

**Be respectful of the audience.** For many, it can be difficult to empathize with those who choose not to vaccinate. But for health communicators, empathy and understanding are imperative. We need look no further than to the example of 18-year-old Ethan



Katherine M. Nicol

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## MAYBE DOCTORS WILL SAVE US ALL

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professionals to increase the visibility of their perspectives.

As an example, we can contribute to existing scientific programs, which have been initiated by organizations such as the National Institutes of Health. As part of existing or new initiatives, it may be helpful to develop workshops for healthcare professionals on effective online communications and contribute to the development of best practices for scientific communications. There's also still an urgent need for research on effective methods for promoting adherence to public health measures among members of the public. This research will likely call for collaboration among experts in communications, social science and public health.

In our view, the medical community has been unexpectedly bold with their social content. This presents a huge opportunity for collaboration to get quality, trusted information out to a public being bombarded from all sides. As communicators, we should embrace this courageous approach.

*Ken Deutsch is Executive Vice President of Research and Insights at JPA Health. Julie Strack is Account Director of Research and Insights at JPA Health. ○*

## HEALTH COMMS. IN A PANDEMIC

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ence during your news Skype interview will transfer reassuringly to your patients during their telehealth visits. Telehealth also means that you can spend a bit of extra time to answer questions fully, while assessing patients' in-home surroundings to get a clearer understanding of their mental health. Have other resource information handy, such as meal delivery services. And if in-person visits are required, reassure them about the precautions being taken.

The healthcare industry is inherently one of emotional upheaval that requires a steadfast resolve to navigate. These are traits that, combined with some professional media guidance, give you the potential to be the leadership voices we need during the pandemic crisis.

*Thomas Graham is the Founder and CEO of Austin, TX-based Crosswind Media & Public Relations. Dr. Singh is immediate past Chief Medical Officer of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Chair of the Pain Management Task Force. ○*

## BUILDING TRUST

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Lindenberger, who testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions about his decision to catch up on missed vaccinations against the wishes of his mother, who chose not to vaccinate Ethan or his siblings. He drove home the point that anti-vaccine individuals do not, "root their opinions in malice, but rather a true concern for themselves and other people." Messages related to vaccine hesitancy should always be respectful and empathetic in tone, while specifically addressing barriers and concerns in a manner that is reassuring to vaccine-hesitant individuals.

The sea-change we all hope for when it comes to vaccinations can't and won't occur without clear, accurate, effective communication and the dedicated commitment of health communicators to accept the responsibility and the critical role we can play in combating the perpetuation of vaccine misinformation and building trust in our agencies and our experts. The opportunity is here. The time is now. Let's get to work.

*Katherine Nicol is a Senior Vice President at Hager Sharp. ○*

## PHARMA'S HIGH-STAKES MOMENT

— Continued from page 10

When brought to life with relatable examples, anecdotes and applications, scientific data can be a revelation. Analyses can help shape new thinking about a disease category or an investigational treatment or help further define how to overcome the unmet needs of patients.

Step back and remember the bigger impact you have on the end user. Ultimately, that's the researcher's holy grail, too.

### The prize

Can the pharma industry seize this high-stakes moment to renew its reputation—and live up to its lifesaving promise? Pharma is in the floodlights now. It cannot operate without considering how the pandemic has affected its key audiences—and will continue to impact and influence their lives.

The companies that shine will be the ones whose words and actions align with their highest values—and who can speak authentically and effectively to the needs of their most essential audiences.

*Sarah Fox is a Vice President in Padilla's Health Practice. ○*



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# When the communicator becomes the patient

How one PR pro's journey to the "other side" of healthcare communications provided enough patient insights to last a lifetime.

By Jennifer Brantley

It's a challenging time to be a professional communicator, but it's never been more important that we do our jobs well, especially for those of us who work for healthcare providers or with them as strategic consultants.

Setting the pandemic aside for the moment, the PR profession for the past several years has been increasingly pivoting away from the traditional ways of creating messages and engaging with audiences. We've had to adapt to executing across myriad platforms that have emerged from the ever-changing media landscape, and to develop new ways to vie for narrowing attention spans of diverse and sometimes polarized targets.

"We must cut through the noise!" has become a frequent battle cry in the past decade. How to do that, especially in the times we're living through, has become the rub.

The COVID-19 pandemic is driving "the noise" to new volumes, and the healthcare industry—providers, insurance companies, scientific researchers, et al—are at ground zero in providing information, services and hope to a diverse audience hungry for details and fatigued with it all. I'm up for the challenge.

I began my communications career more than 25 years ago as an intern, and almost since day one I've worked with healthcare-related clients, from hospitals to physician groups, to health insurance companies. Early on, I worked on copy for mammogram brochures, wrote news releases on the first baby born in a new year and helped plan groundbreaking events. Later, I jumped into the fire of crisis management, worked on challenging internal communication projects and led teams as they juggled many balls in the air at once. It's been a labor of love.

At MP&F Strategic Communications, we've always preached "understand your audience": how they like to get information, what they want to know and what you want them to do. It's something I was taught early on, and I've always endeavored to do just that. In some cases, however, that's easier said than done.

## Becoming the audience

There are many ways to understand your audience, beginning with solid research, both quantitative and qualitative. Sometimes it's just a matter of taking the time to transfer what you already know through

observation. If you're writing copy regarding healthcare topics for seniors, ask yourself, "What would my mother or grandmother want to know?"

But nothing beats the real thing. A little over a year ago, I was on the other side of healthcare communications. It started with three words: "You have cancer." And a few months into my treatment, the words: "There's a pandemic, and you're at high risk."

My journey since has included fear, hope and perseverance. Along the way, my priority was getting information instead of providing it, and I will carry that with me the rest of my career as I help my healthcare clients know their audiences.

I was diagnosed with myxofibrosarcoma, a soft tissue tumor. I wish I could tell you how many cancer-related releases and brochures I've written over the years and the number of events I've planned around Cancer Survivors Day or free "insert cancer type here" screening. Never once did I consider it could be me.

My chemotherapy treatments started last fall and ended in January, followed by five weeks of radiation treatments. My surgery was scheduled for March 25, and on March 11, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.

I'd been working with one of my healthcare clients to develop a website whose single focus was on COVID-19. Being someone in the middle of cancer treatments, I was able to work with the client and our team to share what people at the highest risk were most concerned about. I used my experience to help develop FAQs and other tips to help educate our audiences. I knew people like me were scared, and I wanted to help deliver some peace of mind in our communications.

I had surgery on March 25, and I came back to work in April with the pandemic in full force. I needed physical therapy, but I didn't want to leave my house. Thank goodness for telehealth. After having my first session, I realized I wasn't prepared. I shared this with my team, and we helped our client deliver some tips for preparing for a telehealth appointment.

Here's what I found out about healthcare communications by being on the other side:

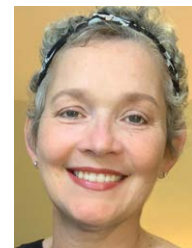
- These are real people we're communicating with, and many aren't well-versed when it comes to healthcare lingo. Keep it informational, but simple.

- Try to put yourself in their shoes. Ask, "If this were me, what would I want to know?" How and where would I want to hear it?"

- Don't communicate down to them; communicate to them. You should think of them as a family member.

- If you don't have a personal experience around the topic or truly understand it, find someone who does. Seek their guidance.

- Don't be afraid to use your personal healthcare experience to help a client or your company better communicate with their audiences. After all, you've experienced it.



Jennifer Brantley

## The road ahead

Healthcare communicators are facing a lot of uncertainties, and there are many challenges ahead. One of the big ones will be regarding the development and testing of a coronavirus vaccine. Will there be more than one coming to market? How will the safety of the vaccine be communicated? How will people be convinced to get a vaccine, especially in the politically charged atmosphere it's being developed in? What is the most effective messaging?

The vaccine issue and how to communicate will be a difficult task, but one that's extremely vital to our ability to beat COVID-19. It's not clear exactly who will be taking the lead on a vaccine public information campaign, but the time is now for healthcare communicators to plan their own outreach efforts to patients and the general public.

There are other issues facing providers, such as the safety of elective surgeries and regular checkups and encouraging the use of telehealth for appointments.

On that last point, I can assure you that I have a clear understanding of what patients need and want to know, and how they want to hear about telehealth.

Being diagnosed with cancer, having surgery and going through the recovery process during a global pandemic have given me insights I will use for the rest of my career. And the rest of my life.

Jennifer Brantley is a Partner with MP&F Strategic Communications in Nashville, Tenn. ○





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# Telehealth transforms care delivery, consumer behavior

How communicators can help build a greater understanding and trust in telehealth.

By Denise Aube

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has created upheaval across all industry segments and changed consumer behaviors faster than ever. Healthcare is a prime example: look no further than the quantum leap made in the use of telehealth by consumers and providers in just a matter of months.

Research shows the use of telehealth by Americans surged from about eight percent in December 2019 to almost 30 percent in May of 2020. More than 75 percent of U.S. hospitals and health practitioners now connect with patients through video and other technologies. Earlier this year, in response to the pandemic, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services expanded Medicare coverage for telehealth visits. Meanwhile, stock prices of telehealth companies are soaring.

While the immediacy and necessity of this COVID-induced trend is easy to understand, the prevalence and impacts of telehealth are far reaching and will likely create a new status quo for care delivery and patient engagement in the long term. For healthcare marketers and communicators, that means creating awareness and education programs equally as timely and innovative to engage patients and consumers in ways that build trust and more effective use of telehealth services.

## Expanded access and ultra convenience

While the growth of telehealth has been steadily inching along for many years, now it's moving at Mach speed. Many who feel safer at home during the pandemic—particularly those with pre-existing medical conditions—have already turned to telehealth out of necessity. But ultimately, access to telehealth services will become the norm and selected by choice.

Besides the obvious convenience, telehealth can have a dramatic, positive impact on overall public health. More Americans can access valuable, timely mental health counseling through telehealth services. And in many rural communities with a diminishing number of hospitals, primary care practices and specialists, telehealth offers a critical safety net. Long drives, sometimes multiple hours, and the accompanying time needed to take off from work, are major obstacles for people to seek care. Telehealth can help remove those barriers, allowing for more effective preventive care and screenings, early diagnosis, and treatment, while also saving costs.

Providers are also realizing the benefits of telehealth. Physicians and allied health professionals are reporting they can get more done with fewer distractions using telehealth in the right cases. And it's only a matter of time that further integration of telehealth, electronic medical records and prescribing will create added convenience, adherence to care plans and improved patient outcomes.

## Tips to communicate about telehealth

While telehealth is a hot topic, consumer understanding and familiarity with telehealth remains limited in many cases, and provider best practices for patient engagement are rapidly evolving. Here are some communications strategies and tactics to improve on both fronts:

**Focus internally first.** As you roll out telehealth initiatives, provide clear guidance and training to prepare internal stakeholders who engage with patients and are important brand ambassadors. From the Chief Medical Officer to nurse practitioners to administrative staff members, all should be able to communicate with clarity and consistency about the ins and outs of your telehealth program.

**Keep it simple.** Newbie telehealth users have many questions: How does it work? What technology do I need? How will my information be kept private and secure? Will my insurance cover telehealth? Make sure you answer the basic questions with simple, clear materials. Checklists, infographics, explainer videos and other tools can ease anxiety and help patients prepare for their telehealth visit with confidence.

A new website from the Health Resources and Services Administration, telehealth.HHS.gov, offers valuable resources for consumers and providers to learn about and improve the telehealth experience.

**Streamline the digital user experience.** Whatever technology platform or apps you offer, go the extra mile to make sure the user interface is clean and intuitive. From Gen Z to older Boomers, today's consumer expects a superior user experience with simple prompts, user paths and functionality. Poor design, confusing log-in processes and frustrating downloads can put a quick damper on things. If the user experience is overly complicated, people will assume the same about your telehealth services. As more health systems, provider groups and national telehealth brands expand their influence and footprint, the more you will

need to match the experiences they deliver.

## Warm up the "e-bedside" manner.

While telehealth has many advantages, creating a productive personal connection and demonstrating compassion can be more difficult from a distance. Training providers to make better eye contact, read body language and convey empathy is critical. An engaging telehealth visit can boost a patient's confidence in their care—and your brand—as well as their likelihood to comply with their prescribed course of treatment.



Denise Aube

## Share examples and success stories.

Sharing positive patient/provider testimonials can also go a long way in reducing uncertainty or potential anxiety about virtual care. Consider highlighting ways telehealth is being used effectively for both primary care and a wide range of specialties such as orthopedics, gastroenterology, urology, cardiology, pediatrics, and internal medicine.

## Promote through integrated outreach.

There are a variety of paid, earned, shared, and owned media opportunities to provide education and promote telehealth to current and prospective patients and consumers. Searches of telehealth-related terms on Google have increased by seven times since February, so make sure your organic SEO and paid search efforts are dialed in to capture active seekers. Use social channels to demonstrate thought leadership and provide educational tips. Consider holding Facebook Lives or a Telehealth Talk video series to demonstrate your capabilities. Look for interesting story angles to garner positive press coverage. And make sure your website and promotional materials highlight telehealth with rich content that positions your brand as a trusted resource, innovator and advocate for expanding access to quality care.

## It's time to telehealth

As the flu season hits and COVID-19 continues to create more questions and uncertainty about our nation's healthcare delivery, the rates of adoption and innovation in telehealth will gain even more momentum. Smart healthcare organizations and communicators who get ahead of the curve will be well positioned for success.

*Denise Aube is a brand strategist and Health Practice Leader at Crosby Marketing Communications. ○*



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# Managing healthcare comms. through a pandemic

Using the right channels to provide clear, consistent information that reaches physicians, staff, patients and the public has never been more critical.

By Jamie Maites and Liam Collopy

When an unprecedented public health crisis of the magnitude of COVID-19 strikes, it can test the communications plans of even the best-prepared organizations, but for healthcare providers at the forefront of the battle against an enemy as formidable as the coronavirus it can be especially challenging. Much of the media focus during the pandemic, deservedly so, has been on the heroic professionals on the frontlines in day-to-day contact with patients—valiant doctors, nurses and other hospital staff—and their selfless efforts.

But what about those healthcare professionals in charge of communicating critical information in a timely manner to the public and employees during the crisis? The ability to communicate clearly and consistently has been critical during COVID-19, as patient volumes and case volumes have fluctuated, the availability of testing has increased, mental health demand has risen, and non-critical procedures have either been postponed or handled via alternate channels such as telemedicine. In this environment, the ability to provide mission-critical information to staff, patients and others, using the right channels at the right time, has never been more urgent.

At MarinHealth, we quickly and proactively responded to the COVID-19 crisis, launching a multifaceted communications program offering sound advice, education and support to the community. As an independent hospital in Marin County, CA our plan focused on reaching a wide range of constituencies, including physicians and staff, patients and prospective patients, members of the community, public health officials and partners. Home to more than 250,000 residents, Marin County has seen more than 6,600 positive COVID-19 cases since March and is one of 19 California counties currently designated as “Tier 1,” the state’s most restrictive COVID-19 status.

By working together across our PR, marketing and digital teams we were able to adopt, early in the crisis, a highly flexible strategy and outreach plan that was responsive to shifts in the course of the pandemic, setting a communications benchmark for the healthcare industry.

## Putting the plan in place

Even before COVID-19 cases began to accelerate in March, the collective MarinHealth team mobilized to create a blueprint that would allow us to be ready to face the

crisis. In putting our plan in place, we took into account the full range of communications vehicles we would need to employ. In addition to using broadcast spots and print and digital media, we considered how best to communicate with physicians, staff, patients and the community at large as the crisis evolved, from breakout, through surge, and more recently into recovery and safety.

The plan incorporated executive communications, signage, direct mail, social media and e-mail, as well as one-to-one communications with our many constituents during each phase of the pandemic. Among the key initiatives that were part of the plan:

- Proactive PR, offering preventative tips from our physician experts to the public via print, broadcast and radio outlets.
- TV, radio and print advertising, including 30-second TV spots, 60-second COVID radio messages, and print advertising in local and regional media.
- The launch of a dedicated MarinHealth COVID-19 web page to keep the community informed of precautions, safety tips and updates.
- Raising awareness of COVID testing capabilities at our adult acute care clinic and telehealth options at all of our MarinHealth | UCSF Health Clinics.
- Virtual classes, podcasts and webcasts.
- Operational updates through our website and aggressive use of social media channels for purposes of conveying critical information and education.
- New digital and print content on issues such as mask and safety policies, screening and testing, telemedicine, and elective procedures.

To more effectively communicate with patients throughout the crisis, we instituted a series of ten weekly emails, beginning in April and continuing through the end of June. Two versions of each email were created, one for our free Health Connection newsletter membership, and one for non-members, which included a special callout encouraging readers to enroll in the free program immediately for timely intelligence.

Each communication included links to additional information, such as hospital, clinic, community, and general health and wellness tips and ideas, and a thematic focus, such as mental health, exercise and nutrition, telehealth and ER/urgent care safety.

Results of the email campaign far exceeded

expectations, with open and click through rates well above the industry norm. In addition, engagement with our content has been exceedingly strong, with more than 600 people attending a recent podcast. Moreover, the program generated nearly 400 new Health Connection newsletter members, twice the number of new members that enrolled during the entire 2019 year.

Looking back at the success of our highly collaborative communications plan, a number of lessons were instrumental in helping us navigate the pandemic effectively and in helping us to get critical information and education out to our community constituents.

## Early planning

By preparing and readying ourselves for the crisis early, we immediately knew the steps that we needed to take should COVID-19 cases spike. While a pandemic is by its nature unpredictable, we had the necessary communications capabilities in place to respond immediately.

## Cross-functional collaboration

By effectively mobilizing the efforts and talents of our PR, marketing and digital teams and ensuring we were all on the same page, we were prepared to move swiftly to make sure information could be conveyed to the public and staff in a rapid, accurate and most effective manner.

## Overcommunication

Through constant communication amongst the team, we were able to provide information to our patients and community in a timely fashion through multiple media (email, television, ads, newsletters, social media, etc.). Knowledge is indeed power, especially in the midst of a pandemic. Frequent and consistent collaboration across our communications team and with our colleagues has allowed us to recalibrate and respond as events on the ground evolved. Our team met—and continues to meet—multiple times per day, seven days a week, providing critical information to help the public and our staff stay informed and navigate through uncharted waters.

Jamie Maites is Vice President of Marketing & Communications at MarinHealth and Liam Collopy is Executive Vice President at Stanton Public Relations and Marketing. ○



Jamie Maites



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# Congress, car sales and healthcare

The healthcare sector has witnessed an erosion of trust in recent years, and with COVID-19, provider organizations' reputations have reached new lows. Here's how hospitals, health systems and medical groups can navigate through this barrier and earn back consumer confidence.

By Chowning J. Aguilera

**M**embers of Congress and people in car sales: on the surface they don't have a lot in common. But they were, in fact, the two least trusted professions according to a 2018 Statista study. Most trusted? Unsurprisingly, nurses followed by doctors.

While the study examined individual professions, it's easy to assume this trust translates to the business segment in which these professionals work. Perhaps 20 years ago that would be the case, but brands, regardless of industry, have continued to experience trust erosion with the consumers they serve. Healthcare as an industry is no exception. One study indicates our trust in the healthcare profession plummeted from 75 percent in 1966 to a mere 34 percent in 2018.

Healthcare's trust erosion may be slower than other industries due to our deeper trust for nurses and doctors. However, the shift of patients to consumers, evolving generational preferences and changing belief systems weakened healthcare's once perceived immunity. Simply put, trusting our doctors and nurses isn't enough to make us trust in the organizations for which they work.

It's not surprising why, when you consider some leading factors. For one, healthcare costs continue to climb while consumers shoulder more financial burden than ever before. With the advancement of technology comes questions around our personal health information's security, ownership and use. And while other industries continue to innovate to meet modern-day consumer demands, healthcare continues to lag behind.

## A further fall from grace or reinvention

Enter COVID-19. The places and people we look to for our care in sickness and wellness reached a new crossroad. In one direction is a path to reinvention; in the other is a further decline on the trust spectrum, both equally dependent on how healthcare organizations responded in past months and how they'll respond moving forward. Mass adoption of telemedicine, which puts the consumer in control of where and when they receive care, is one leap forward in the right direction, and to be sure, there've been a few during this time. However, regardless of what these organizations do, there are boulders that have been placed in their path.

**Public health's politicization.** At one point in time, public health was seen as a

key component of the social contract. That's no longer the case. We've seen examples of local government, public health entities and healthcare organizations working together for the greater good, but more often in dysfunctional or disjointed ways. Hospitals and health systems are trying to care for our communities as they always have, but the reality is that COVID and all its complications have placed them squarely in the middle of the political story.

**Care avoidance.** While many are back in the saddle and seeking routine and emergency care, hospitals continue to see patients avoiding non-COVID-related emergency care, leading to unnecessary health complications, and in some cases preventable deaths. The public's anxiety, uncertainty and fear run the risk of creating deeper distrust and barriers in accessing care.

**Media landscape polarization.** The COVID reporting era proves repeatedly that hospitals and health systems are consistently painted in a negative light. On the other side, honor and praise fall upon individuals providing care. Clickbait stories, misinformation and a perceived lack of transparency from healthcare organizations could create long-term challenges in re-connecting with the communities they serve.

Our healthcare organizations and the people who hold them up are road weary, weathering what's left of this storm and continuing on paths to recovery. Some will emerge in their communities recognized for their Herculean efforts, but others will lose footing and trust.

## Communicating with care

Communications and marketing can't be a salve for all war wounds, but public trust is in large part contingent on how well healthcare organizations utilize these tools. The industry's pre-COVID march toward consumerism already demanded reinvention in positioning, marketing and communications, creating moments of connection, engagement and humanity. COVID upped the ante. Organizations that put the following considerations at the center of every effort will inch ahead of the competition in earning back consumer trust or deepening the trust they already have.

**People centerstage.** While healthcare can still rely on the mantra of "build it and they will come," earning community trust, affinity and loyalty requires a perspective shift. Marketing the hospital, medical group or

service line with brand name alone can miss the mark. Patient stories are compelling because we see ourselves in them. But what's missing in creating a deeper sense of connection? The people: the doctors and nurses, the greeters, the patient access staff, the environmental services team and myriad of individuals who make healthcare hum. Show the people behind the care, tell their stories and enable communities to connect with them on a human level, well beyond their clinical excellence.

**Transparency and tone.** Healthcare organizations want and need patient volumes to continue increasing to a normal level. Many consumers are ready to get back to routine care and planned procedures that were delayed. Others are still concerned and anxious, aka "care avoidance." As a result, organizations have to meet everyone where they are. They need to imbue a sense of transparency. While most healthcare organizations won't want or be able to share all details, finding the right places to bring the public and media in, figuratively speaking, will create a sense of openness.

**Empathy always.** Like every sector, maintaining business continuity from a marketing and communications perspective has been a delicate dance since March. What do we need to communicate right now? Can we restart campaigns, do we need to pivot or pause entirely? If we do push something out, how do we convey our messages without alienating or offending audiences? The list goes on and the climate that impacts our answers is dynamic. Whether it's a media statement, internal communications or marketing service lines, an empathy-first mentality needs to be at the core of everything. Recognizing the feelings of your audience, potential anxiety and different risk appetites should guide what you say and how you say it. Without empathy, we unintentionally risk fraying fragile consumer trust.

A healthcare organization's reputation is a mix of what they say and how they say it along with what they do and how they do it. The result? Caring for patients is inexorable.



Chowning J. Aguilera

— Continued on next page



# Pharma's shifting reputation in the COVID era

Communicating their efforts to find a solution while staying ahead of potential reputational risks will be paramount for pharma companies searching for a COVID-19 vaccine.

By Camilla White, Simona Kormanikova and Bridie Lawlor O'Boyl

In September 2019, Gallup published its annual poll which found the pharma industry was the most poorly-regarded industry in the U.S. It was the lowest the industry has ranked since the poll launched 19 years ago. Less than a year later, a U.S. survey conducted by FTI Consulting revealed that public perceptions of the biopharmaceutical industry had improved significantly amid global efforts to address COVID-19. This is perhaps no great surprise with the world turning to the industry as a key leader in the fight against the pandemic. But as we look to a post-COVID era, staying ahead of potential reputational risks will be critical for pharma to continue building on this upswing in public perception.

## Leading the fight

As the world faces an unprecedented health crisis, the pharma industry has stepped up to spearhead efforts to find a solution. Collaborating like never before, companies have teamed up to share data and research, and apply different technologies and platforms to accelerate the search for treatments or a vaccine. When a vaccine eventually becomes available, the industry has already committed to providing additional expertise and resources to manufacture at scale.

FTI's survey findings reflect an acknowledgement of pharma's critical role in the crisis: more than 50 percent of respondents viewed the industry more favorably based on how it has handled the pandemic thus far. However, 42 percent of respondents also believe the industry will price Americans out of the vaccine and misuse funds, reflecting potential reputational challenges to come.

With all eyes on pharma, companies must push ahead to help solve this global crisis while also developing and deploying short and longer-term strategies to tell their story accurately and impactfully to further improve public perception.

## Safety over politics

As we approach the U.S. presidential election, pharma companies' efforts to find a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19 could be engulfed in political rhetoric as candidates seek to position themselves on key pandemic-related issues. A recent STAT-Harris poll revealed that 78 percent of Americans worry the COVID-19 vaccine approval process is already being driven more by politics than science.

At a time when the public needs reassurance that developing a vaccine quickly will not compromise safety, companies need to focus their message on just that: ensuring safety. And the industry is already starting to come together to take control of the narrative. In September, nine biopharma leaders—Pfizer, Sanofi, AstraZeneca, Moderna, BioNTech, Merck, Johnson & Johnson, GlaxoSmithKline and Novavax—jointly pledged to “stand with science” and uphold “high ethical standards and sound scientific principles,” countering claims that they might seek premature approval ahead of the presidential election on November 3.

As political campaigns gather pace ahead of the election, continuing to find ways to clearly articulate priorities and commitments as a group will help the industry maintain its focus and its message. Communications strategies that consistently engage all stakeholders using the most effective channels will be critical to cut through the noise and reach audiences during this unprecedented period in both U.S. politics and the global fight against COVID-19.

## Hope for the best, prepare for the future

As we look beyond the election, pharma must also keep an eye on topics that've come into focus during the pandemic and could pose risks down the line. Anticipating and preparing for potential crises, both reputational and health, is a key tenet of Environment, Social and Governance strategies that coincides with increased attention on ESG factors in recent months as companies and their stakeholders reflect on how to better navigate times of uncertainty.

COVID-19 has highlighted social factors across all sectors, but pharma in particular will need to anticipate scrutiny around the price of a vaccine once one reaches the market. A recent Moody's Investor Services report suggests that “given the significant public health implications, reputational harm could ensue if prices are perceived to be too high,” and “with global demand likely to far outstrip initial supplies, the equitable distribution of vaccines also poses social risks.”

However, pharma has also made good progress in ESG areas even against the backdrop of a pandemic. According to the same Moody's report, there are positive implications for pharma's relations with customers and stakeholders such as patients, doctors, hospitals, governments and global health authorities. We've also seen a num-

ber of renewed commitments to the environment, significant donations to impacted communities, and improved workplace flexibility and safety. As the world faces continued urgent health needs, a long path to economic recovery and uncertainty across the board, these issues remain fundamental to business sustainability and to stakeholders.

As the tireless efforts to find a solution for COVID-19 continue, maintaining a clear focus and a narrative in the current environment while mitigating longer-term risks will be integral to improving public opinion of the pharma industry. By emphasizing commitment to patient safety, navigating the election and anticipating risks associated with ESG factors, pharma companies can communicate their efforts as responsible corporate citizens to build on what it has already achieved and further strengthen its reputation in the U.S. and globally.

*Camilla White is Managing Director, Simona Kormanikova is Senior Director and Bridie Lawlor O'Boyl is Senior Consultant in FTI's Strategic Communications, Healthcare and Life Sciences U.S. team. ○*



Camilla White



Simona Kormanikova



Bridie Lawlor O'Boyl

## CAR SALES AND HEALTHCARE

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bly combined with the way these businesses market and communicate. COVID offers healthcare an opportunity to begin building deeper, more authentic engagement with constituents, perhaps even inching ahead of other industries struggling to regain consumer trust. So, let's strive for healthcare organizations to top the trust charts, not just the care teams who work inside them.

*Chowning J. Aguilera is Healthcare Practice Lead at Jackson Spalding. ○*

# Healthcare PR: What's the new normal?

Why healthcare startups are thriving while many large hospital systems are currently facing budget cuts.

By David Landis

Having been around the block a while, our agency has seen industry sectors boom and bust. And, in turn, some of the public relations professionals that serve those industries have succumbed to the vagaries of economic upheaval.

But at LCI, we had a plan. We implemented what we thought was a recession-proof strategy after the last Great Recession: concentrate on healthcare. The theory was, people will always need healthcare, and with a sizable Boomer generation getting older—and ready to retire—it would be a growing industry sector.

And then COVID hit—and changed everything. That old adage comes to mind: “The only thing constant in life is change.”

So, what's the “new normal” in healthcare PR? Let's take a look at what happened to the industry and how it impacted the PR sector. We all assumed that healthcare providers—and their PR professionals—would be even more needed, especially during times of crises and, above all, during pandemics. Instead, it turned out to be a mixed bag.

Why? Because the U.S. healthcare system is set up so that the economic generators for healthcare organizations—mostly elective surgeries—were completely interrupted because of the pandemic. And the snowball effect was that healthcare systems that needed to be there for us during a pandemic had even fewer resources to handle the pandemic. The snowball grew to an avalanche: organizations made budget cuts throughout their businesses, including public relations (both externally and internally).

According to Jack O'Brien, writing for *Health Leaders* in March, “The rapid spread of coronavirus has U.S. hospitals faced with several issues related to operating margins, revenue collection and reimbursement for treating patients with this disease. Within the past two weeks, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has significantly disrupted the American way of life, sinking the country's economic system and placing hospitals under unprecedented financial and clinical stress.”

In the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley region where we work, according to the *San Francisco Business Times*, budget cuts were widespread. Stanford Health Care cut salaries by 20 percent beginning in April. University of California-San Francisco cut costs by \$45 million in July. And Sutter Health reported more than a \$1 billion

loss for the first quarter of 2020 (their financials turned around in the second quarter, with net \$231 million, but for the first half of 2020, the system still had a loss of \$831 million). (Full disclosure, all of these healthcare systems are former LCI clients).

To survive, healthcare systems are looking for unique ways to ride the financial vagaries, such as forging new partnerships with insurers to pave the way. In our market, Cigna and Dignity Healthcare just announced a new agreement between the two entities that will allow Dignity's hospitals, outpatient surgery centers and medical groups to be in-network providers for Cigna members.

There's a silver lining in all this. While traditional, big healthcare providers have faced undue financial challenges, healthcare startups are riding a new—and positive—wave.

According to Tara Bannow, reporter with *Modern Healthcare* (July, 2020), the “pandemic has spurred a flood of venture capital funding to healthcare startups. Venture capital funding in healthcare intensified in the first half of 2020 as COVID-19 made virtual care and similar technologies indispensable. Startups focused on telehealth, mental health, wearables and even transportation have gained new relevance during the pandemic. Companies that convinced investors of their long-term staying power even after the crisis subsides gained particular traction when it came to raising capital.”

“We've seen decades of progress in 12 to 14 weeks,” said Unity Stoakes, President and Co-Founder of the healthcare startup incubator StartUp Health.

“Global venture capital funding for digital health and health innovation,” continued Bannow, “totaled \$9.1 billion in the first half of the year, up from \$7.7 billion during the same period in 2019, according to a second-quarter report from StartUp Health. And 2019 was itself a banner year for startup funding. (Many of) the types of companies that attracted funding are both directly and indirectly related to the pandemic. Virtual care platform Conversa Health, for instance, in June closed \$12 million in a Series B funding. Conversa helps health systems monitor and manage patients across a variety of specialties, including oncology, acute discharge and wellness. During the pandemic, that has included patients who need to be monitored while quarantined at home. It counts such prominent health

systems as Northwell Health and University Hospitals in Cleveland as clients.”

For us at LCI, this upheaval is just another pivot. We've seen firsthand that many healthcare and biopharma startups here in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley got funded before the pandemic hit; they still have money to spend and recognize the value of PR. For instance, we helped launch Frontier Medicines, a bio-pharma startup funded by a \$67 million Series A financing round last June. (Frontier Medicines leverages chemoproteomics and machine learning to “drug the undruggable” protein targets that drive human disease). Despite the pandemic, we also just signed another new startup healthcare client in August. According to Erica Young, writing for *Healthcare Weekly* in 2019, “We reviewed more than 200 healthcare startups that have received funding or announced major initiatives in 2020.”

Additional areas of PR opportunity are all the new wellness businesses that are springing up during COVID. Market research firm Technavio has been monitoring the health and wellness market and says that it's “poised to grow by \$1299.84 billion during 2020-2024, progressing at a compound annual growth rate of over six percent during the forecast period.” These businesses require and need PR, too.

On another front, many healthcare businesses are re-jiggering to help people weather this pandemic. Our client Centre for Neuro Skills helps patients rehabilitate through traumatic or acquired brain injury. But lately, doctors have noticed that patients have had health consequences after recovering from COVID. These consequences include brain injury and cognitive impairments—which require rehabilitation. Helping clients like this navigate communications through changing COVID waters is yet another way PR pros can help, and a necessary and valued offering that supports business success through a challenging time.

So, the transformations to the healthcare industry aren't bad news for public relations; it's just change. And isn't that something at which PR pros excel?

David Landis is President and CEO of San Francisco-based Landis Communications Inc. (LCI), which this year celebrates 30 years in business. Email David at david@landispr.com. ○



David Landis



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# Keys to representing healthcare technology clients

What it takes for health IT agencies to survive in today's healthcare environment.

By Beth Friedman

**H**ealthcare is a unique industry. What sets it apart is our product: We're in the business of human life. The regulations are complicated and the ramifications of poor quality are disastrous. For example, if HIV testing or cancer screening results are faulty the consequences are grave.

Health information technology supports virtually every process, procedure and encounter in the healthcare ecosystem. While health IT looks ripe for profit from the outside, few companies understand the intensity and specifications of the industry. This is one of the reasons countless *Fortune* 500 companies have entered and left the healthcare space.

Though health IT seems like a market worth investing in, it's not the right fit for every Silicon Valley startup or international corporation. Hence the need for PR and marketing agencies to take a serious look at all prospective health IT clients. Success isn't always assured. Here are seven important questions agencies dedicated to the health IT industry should ask.

**Has the prospective client done the market research?** Make sure the prospective

client conducts market research and knows their target audience. Healthcare technology is wide ranging and it's important to be familiar with the industry's niche areas before diving in. Typical B-to-C public relations and marketing practices don't always work, which is why many companies leave the industry just as quickly as they enter.

**Does the client have at least one or two successful healthcare beta sites ready to be interviewed?** Healthcare buyers are a leery bunch. They rely primarily on peer references from other hospitals, health systems and physician groups. Beta sites are essential for proving the viability of a product and its potential in the healthcare IT space. They deliver the proof points necessary to build credibility and open editorial doors in this industry.

**Do both parties—agency and client—have the right people lined up?** Healthcare experience and knowledge are critical on both sides: agency and client. Make sure the client has a good spokesperson with a clinical background. Credentials are crucial to establishing credibility with healthcare media outlets and associations. In addition, assign team members that have interest in and knowledge of the healthcare field. Passion and commitment speak loudly in healthcare.

**Is everyone comfortable with the healthcare industry lingo?** Clients and agency team members must be familiar with common terminology and acronyms used in healthcare. And beware: there are thousands of them. From medical diagnoses to IT and regulatory lingo, one key to success in healthcare is being able to "talk the talk."

For example, PR team members should know the common medical diagnoses addressed by a client's solution, such as COPD. They should also be familiar with any healthcare technology acronyms used by the target audience. Finally, there's a plethora of regulatory lingo in healthcare such as PHI, or protected health information.

Learning healthcare lingo is important because it helps the client and the agency speak intelligently with each other, with editors and to the industry.

**Are guide rails in place to respect the limitations and regulations of healthcare?** Healthcare is highly regulated and bureaucratic. It's a difficult industry to navigate without understanding the limitations, especially as a PR firm. With laws surrounding privacy and NDAs around proprietary technology and practices, it can be chal-

lenging to create content that also lends itself to credibility.

One way to open editorial doors is through healthcare's professional associations. Virtually every department within a hospital or health system has its own association. These professional associations are often more willing to accept bylined contributions and interview sources from within their ranks.

**Does the team recognize that healthcare is primarily a nonprofit business?** According to the American Hospital Association's 2020 fact sheet on U.S. hospitals, the number of non-government non-profit community hospitals is more than twice the number of investor-owned (for-profit) community hospitals in the US. Hospitals often give their services away for free or at a fraction of the cost when patients can't afford a hospital stay or lack adequate healthcare coverage.

But unlike consumer brands, hospitals must take care of the customer even when the customer is unable to pay. The Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, passed in 1986, states that a hospital can't deny someone medical care based on their ability to pay. Hospitals run on slim margins.

It's important that agencies seeking work in the healthcare industry understand and respect the philanthropy of healthcare.

**Can you quickly build editorial relations within the healthcare trade?** Healthcare editors are a small yet influential group. To build rapport with them, agency teams must be sincere and knowledgeable, understand their niche and invest time and money to meet them. Editors' inboxes often overflow with pitches like in any other industry. However, they tend to rely primarily on their trusted sources. Reach out to the individuals and agencies they trust and form partnerships with them to ease your way into editors' doors.

Healthcare is a complex industry, and you need a team that understands it in order to be successful. Be mindful of the companies you take on, the realities of the industry and the media relationships you create in order to achieve mutual success.

Beth Friedman is Founder and CEO of Agency Ten22 in Atlanta. ○



Beth Friedman

## A health IT agency's journey through COVID-19

**Build a contingency plan.** Examine each team member's role and determine where you can relocate responsibilities in case anyone gets sick. The ability to pivot and be nimble is important as we navigate unprecedented times.

**Identify which clients are going to struggle.** Be flexible with billing. We've been flexible with retainer agreements and billing for those clients hit hardest by the pandemic in order to show goodwill in our industry, support those who need it most and project good business karma.

**Document what you're doing.** This is the first massive, global pandemic in our lifetime. COVID-19 gives us the opportunity to reflect on past business practices and determine how we can adapt during an emergency. Blog and take notes for reference in case your agency is faced with a similar tragedy in the future.

**Offer to help.** Reach out to media and editors to determine how your agency can best support them. Be relevant, shift previously scheduled placements, and help them salvage the opportunities they've lost. Now is the time to lean into your industry relationships.

**Connect more.** We've all felt the strain of isolation. Cultivate camaraderie among your team by coming together on group calls. We've added video to our weekly team calls to strengthen connections through shared personal stories and anecdotes.

**Highlight how your clients are helping.** Recap the work your clients have done during the pandemic whether it's philanthropic or adapting their business to the new normal. Highlight the placements they've earned and continue to look for opportunities to elevate their business.



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# The impact of the pandemic

2020 has reinforced and confirmed some of communications' core tenets, and may also be responsible for driving a new era for healthcare solutions.

By Kate Coyle

After nearly 20 years of working in healthcare communications, the excitement never gets old for me. What's not to love about an industry that's critical to life itself, rife with issues and controversy and delivers a solid dose of the unexpected on a daily basis?

In my mind, a highlight is the problem solving our job requires every day. Whether pursuing an opportunity, managing an issue or leveraging an insight, it's our responsibility to chart the path forward on behalf of our clients. We create integrated annual plans based on industry research and analytics, tailor communications strategies to achieve measurable goals and lead teams to execute against those plans, all while juggling the day-to-day zigs and zags, proactively and reactively tapping into competitive news and industry trends.

From the vantage point of Fall 2020, many of us can recall with deep fondness the start of this year. When the JP Morgan Healthcare Conference came to a close in January, just days after the first COVID-19 death in China was reported by the *New York Times*, the top concerns we faced as an industry were the relative lack of big deals, lack of diversity in the industry and among conference attendees, drug pricing and privacy concerns associated with healthcare AI data. Fast-forward nine months, and ... need I say more? 2020 has consistently delivered the unexpected like an infomercial call-to-action, "But wait, there's more!"

Although the year isn't over, and we find ourselves continuing to work through some of the unexpected challenges 2020 presented, I find this pivotal year has reinforced some of the core tenets of communications, driving pervasive conversations about the healthcare industry and forcing new dialogues on development, efficiency and growth. If harnessed appropriately, globally, the learnings from this year can drive stronger industry positioning before the next pandemic strikes.

## Preparation

A crisis is never welcome, but the right response can drive market reputation. When advising our clients around issues of preparedness, we ensure these critical steps are mapped out in detail and updated with some regularity.

- When first developing a crisis plan, cast a wide net to identify potential expected or unexpected scenarios and vulnerabilities, including those specific to the company and

industry as well as areas that could impact any business.

- Assemble a cross-functional team of in-house and external consultants to serve as subject matter experts should a crisis arise.

- Determine communication protocols and ensure the policy is clear and communicated internally.

- Develop reactive responses and train approved spokespeople on standby statements.

Global pandemics aren't often on the list of expected—or unexpected—scenarios in crisis plans. Encountering this pandemic required quick assessment of previously prepared crisis plans, balanced with a close eye on changing industry updates and a recognition and monitoring of the unknowns.

One additional element of crisis communications that can be overlooked is defining success. This has been a hard lesson in the age of COVID-19 with varied recovery timelines, changing and conflicting mandates and governing bodies setting and moving goalposts without always communicating the rationale or strategy driving decisions.

## Authenticity

Authenticity has always been a core pillar in corporate communications, from leadership, to mission and values and everything in between. In the midst of the global pandemic, authenticity seemed inescapable and yet paramount. Companies were forced to look at themselves in the mirror, or Zoom video share, and put their corporate values to the test. What emerged was a renewed understanding of the importance that when communicating across stakeholders in corporate and healthcare, messaging must be authentic, consistent, credible and concise.

Aligning authenticity and consistency requires awareness and attention to detail. Everything from media materials, social content, investor presentations and internal intranet updates should be consistent with a company's overarching narrative, shifting only when necessary to align with changes in strategic priorities.

This year, the scrutiny that corporate messages are held to was tested from many angles, making proof points, case studies and anecdotes all the more important to validate positioning.

## Collaboration

While biopharma M&A deals and partnerships have long been key components of healthcare R&D, COVID-19 served as a

catalyst for unprecedented industry collaboration that has been instrumental to global rapid-response efforts. Mid-year, while deal value was lower than mid-year 2019, deal volume was up, and there was already a considerable shift towards "risk-sharing" in biopharma partnerships as opposed to "risk-taking."

The influx of COVID-19 public-private partnerships supported clinical trial coordination, mitigated manufacturing bottlenecks and expedited regulatory pathways. In lockstep, the tone of messaging shifted to reflect this unified landscape with an urgency and transparency across data communications to support learnings from failures and successful innovations in parallel paths.



Kate Coyle

## Centenarian views

I had the fortunate experience to spend time with a family friend this summer, a centenarian still sharp as ever as she approaches her 103rd birthday. I asked about her experiences living through two global pandemics. Though she'd just been born when the world was hit with the Spanish flu, she had many stories about resilience, recovery and relative risk. A hundred years from now, when assessing how the world reacted to this global pandemic, it's hard to say what the takeaways will be, but there will surely be many. While I won't hazard to guess what the world will look like in 2120, I feel confident that preparation, authenticity and collaboration will still be critical in the ever-changing, problem-solving world of healthcare communications.

We're not yet on the other side of this pandemic, but I hope that 100 years from now, the centenarians of that time will be able to speak about our resilience and resurgence. Could the flexibility that Operation Warp Speed and the Emergency Use Authorization process enabled help foster continued clinical trial engagement and enrollment in a post-pandemic era? Can we harness the efficiencies born in 2020 to drive a new era for healthcare solutions with enhanced data-sharing technology? Will the elevated understanding and household dialogues around science result in increased STEM funding and inspire more of today's youth to pursue careers in healthcare, resulting in greater diversity across all aspects and titles in the field?

Collectively as healthcare communicators, these are problems we can help solve.

Kate Coyle is Managing Director at ICR. ○

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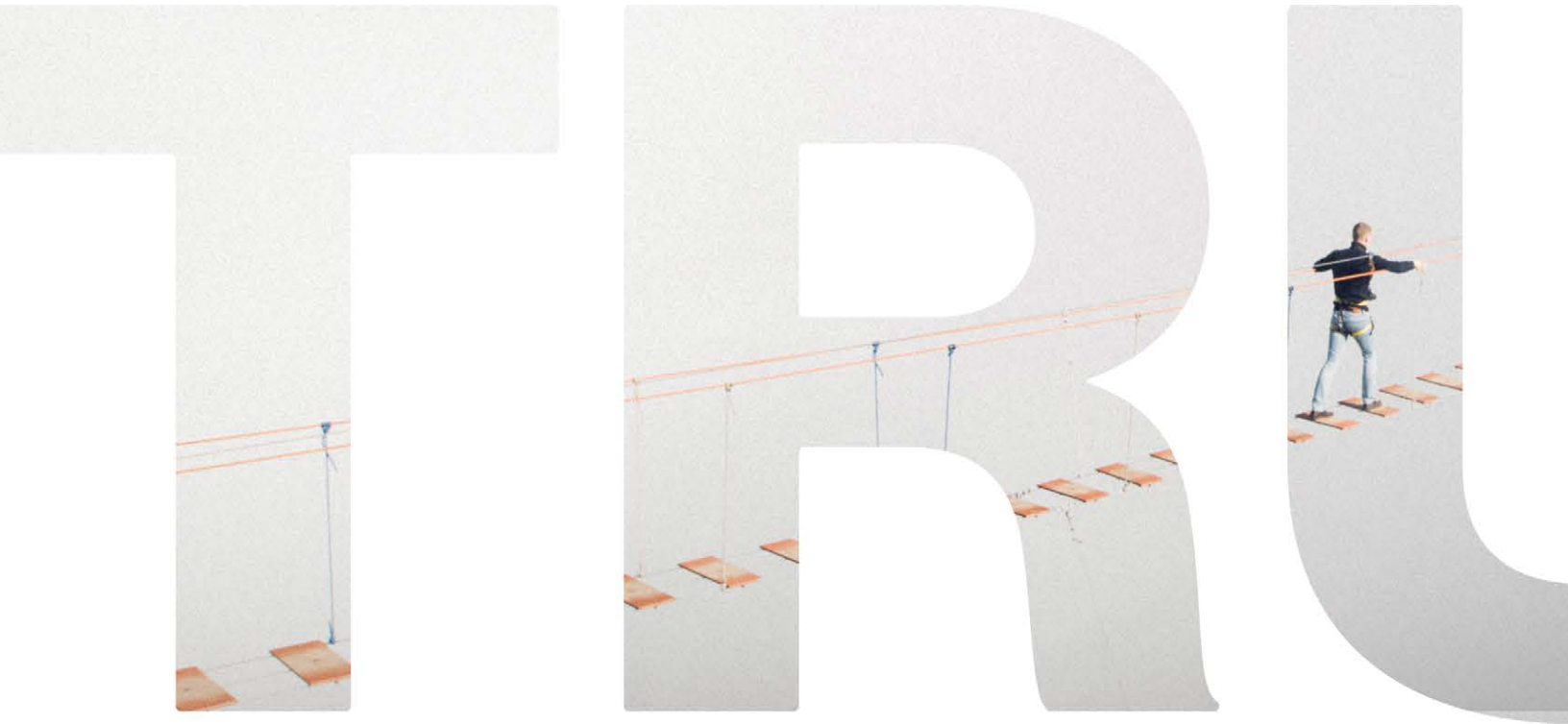
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# Healthcare communications challenges during COVID-19

Why the digital health community has a responsibility to guide consumers through our new reality.

By Kathryn McMahon Arrigg

**C**OVERD-19 has forced us to change our behaviors, and how we manage our healthcare has been no exception. As such, this unforeseen pandemic must also stimulate change in the way stakeholders across the digital health community communicate with consumers and educate them about their products.

The biggest COVID-related transformation across the healthcare landscape is the rise of virtual care and increases in telehealth. While these platforms have slowly gained market share for years, legislation related to patient privacy was largely holding it back until stay-at-home mandates tested the strength of telehealth on a national scale.

But how many of these changes are here to stay once we're on the other side of the pandemic and we resume life as we once knew it?

## Consumer questions

Let's consider where we were less than a year ago: Whether it was due to lack of availability as a result of legislative red tape or personal preferences, many patients didn't take advantage of virtual care options prior to the pandemic. In fact, according to a Kyruus survey, the majority of healthcare consumers had their first-ever virtual visit during the COVID-19 pandemic, and over 75 percent were satisfied with their virtual care experiences. According to a McKinsey report, since the COVID-19 pandemic, medical providers have rapidly scaled their offerings and are seeing 50 to 175 times the number of patients via telehealth than they did before.

Virtual care offers many natural advantages. But what may still be confusing to consumers is what areas of medicine are most effective via virtual health, and what does innovation look like?

It may be easy enough to confer with a general practitioner over the phone about cold symptoms, but what if you need to see your eye doctor about vision problems? Therapists are now seeing patients virtually, and while this channel may be more convenient for patients, can it be as effective as face-to-face interaction? If you notice a rash, it's possible to send an image to your dermatologist, but do you still need to go in for your annual mole scan? As we continue to take advantage of the benefits of virtual care, consumers are asking these questions, and it's the responsibility of collective healthcare stakeholders—government, providers, payers, technology providers—to help consumers navigate this new terrain.

## The reality of wearables

Another factor associated with staying out of the doctor's office is the wide range of digital tools available to today's connected consumer. Without a huge investment, we can easily measure our heart rate, sleep activity and more at our own convenience. In fact, Apple recently announced that its latest version of the Apple Watch will now measure blood oxygen levels. This measurement is particularly interesting right now since lower blood oxygen levels may be a sign of a respiratory illness, such as COVID-19. But how much can you rely on this measurement—and others provided by smart devices—without receiving additional input from your physician? With less frequent doctor visits, the onus is on wearable brands to properly communicate to consumers how to best use this information and when it's time to seek medical attention.

## Channels where brands make a difference

Given these new factors, digital health brands—especially those with a hand in virtual care—have an opportunity and a higher responsibility to help to communicate benefits, early lessons learned and pitfalls of telemedicine. One way to improve communication is to leverage their own data. Key statistics associated with virtual care of interest to stakeholders could include patient satisfaction scores, cost savings, need for in-person intervention, and more.

For example, perhaps an Electronic Health Record vendor has insights into the number of rash-related dermatology cases that were closed out without needing an in-person visit. Brands can deploy that data as part of their content marketing strategy to help inform consumers' decision-making. If they are in a similar position, these types of engagements will help them understand their level of confidence in virtual diagnoses vs. in-person.

Another key focus for brands from a communications standpoint is security associated with virtual care. It's up to brands that are enabling telehealth or providing virtual support via AI to communicate the steps they've taken to reduce the risk of patient data being compromised. Thought leadership highlighting progress brands have made in data security is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how your company is at the forefront of patient data protection.

## What's covered when the dust settles?

Insurance coverage is another area in which consumers will be seeking clear communication. While many are interested in

virtual care, they're unclear about whether their insurance will cover it, especially post-COVID, and which telehealth services are available in their network. While in many cases temporary provisions have been put in place, decisions about future coverage will be in the hands of Medicare and private insurers. Likewise, insurers and insure-tech brands can build loyalty and trust by communicating early and often with consumers about these changes. Email and social media are effective channels, but multimedia tools, such as video and podcasts, are additional ways for executives to communicate changes in a succinct and easy-to-understand manner.



Kathryn McMahon Arrigg

## Tapping in to the new conversation

Clear and succinct communication from brands in the digital health space will continue to be essential during this new era, but just as COVID has mandated a new experience, brands must also match that path with new strategies to effectively reach consumers.

The first step is to assess your tools for media and social listening to better understand and monitor virtual care and telehealth conversations. This discovery process will give brands the information they need to adjust messaging and positioning as needed. Take the same steps you would if you were a newly formed company: Reassess your brand's competitive differentiators within the context of the new landscape, develop brand language, test positioning with key audiences and segment thought leadership efforts to align with buyer personas. Re-train your executive thought leadership team on how to communicate new messages across earned, owned and shared channels. From there, measure key analytics early and often to assess whether this new positioning is effectively breaking into the new conversation and having an impact.

Our communities may look and feel different, but the goal of thought leadership remains the same: to inspire consideration and action. Regardless of the outcome of the telehealth revolution, digital health brands should invest in thought leadership and leverage data. Brands that tap these resources to ensure consumers have a proper understanding of their options, changing regulations and the benefits of this new frontier in healthcare will position themselves to be the most successful.

Kathryn McMahon Arrigg is Director at PAN Communications. ○



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# Unlocking clinical trial recruitment in the COVID-19 era

Best integrated marketing practices for addressing unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

By Michael Roth and Bob Pearson

It's nearly impossible to identify a facet of our healthcare industry that hasn't been directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It follows that the vast majority of health news and information is focused on the pandemic itself, as well as ways to stay safe and healthy. So, where does that leave the other 99 percent of products and services that are still vital to our long-term health and wellness? Marketing, lead generation and education of any kind now require that we step back and think hard about new approaches and more innovative methods to get your messages out there and meet your strategic goals. That would make common sense.

Yet many agencies find themselves addressing "COVID-era" business challenges through a lens that matches a time that's come and gone. It's vital that we take a hard look at once successful strategies and tactics across our marketing armamentarium and pressure-test them for the post-COVID era.

Most recently, Bliss and Next Practices Group industry leaders looked at the state of our Clinical Trial Recruitment marketing work and decided it was time to "flip it on its head" in this new era as we strive to hit the ultimate client objective: rapid enrollment.

## The new obstacles

If you're fortunate enough to work on potential COVID-19 treatments, you'll confront a litany of unforeseen obstacles involved in trial enrollment. Conflicting or confusing guidance from federal agencies, widespread public fear of both the disease and a potential cure, the media's desire—on both sides—to unearth conflict and bolster a political angle on scientific issues and trial sites trying to find patients that fit narrow enrollment criteria are all factors that make the already staggering task of clinical trial enrollment extremely difficult.

Even if you're working on CTR that has little or nothing to do with COVID-19, you're dealing with trial sites that you once relied upon being torn in multiple directions. Medical institutions are increasingly understaffed and no longer focused on business as usual. In short, they're underperforming and not meeting CTR goals. To compound the issue, patient referrals have plummeted, as physicians are focused elsewhere. And finally, outreach efforts are falling flat because no one really cares about "foot fungus" during the age of the worst global pandemic since The Spanish Flu.

## A smarter approach

The truth is, during times of accelerated competition for patients, disparate resources and scattered focus by local sites, success will require a hyper-agile, targeted marketing campaign that can be thought of as PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned) Plus. Our approach to unlocking clinical trial enrollment relies heavily upon assembling the right team of experts, including: regulatory experts to iron-out complex Institutional Review Board situations; a top-notch analytics team; "audience architecture" acumen to drive all media choices; senior media strategists and practitioners; and site-driven technological innovation to make sure the funnel—from top to bottom—is fully operational and eradicates any obstacles that lay between a potential applicant and enrollment.

PESO Plus is known for its agility. Our use of sophisticated algorithms helps us understand where to focus in each city, whom to reach out to and how local ecosystems actually operate. We can see what's working, when to use paid, earned, shared or owned marketing tactics, when to combine strategies for greater impact and, quite frankly, when to stop doing any work that's not as effective as we thought. We let the truth of the market guide our efforts.

Within our model, we use the "5 Ms" as a strategic filter:

### The 5 Ms

To have a good shot at delivering optimal patient enrollment numbers to clients, we recommend an approach that uses "The 5 Ms," which works as follows:

**Maximize your study sites.** Each site is a launch pad to tell the full story of the trial (e.g., disease, history of medication, development of your treatment, past successes) and engage in thought leadership. Analytics provides the precision to know who can best tell the story, where we can most effectively reach patients and what aspects of our story will resonate.

**Message the story so it's simple and shareable.** If we follow the ABCDE Model—audience, behavior, content, design/delivery and evaluation—we can create a straightforward narrative and align core messages that have potential to shape the market. We also optimize our ability to ensure all sites are aligned and all media are receiving the same basic messaging.

**Match interest and media.** If identifying interest is the main objective, we real-

ize that awareness works more effectively when the audience is interested in the topic. Common sense. Through analytics, we can focus earned, shared and paid media on specific locations to match desire or need with awareness.

### Make it easy to enroll.

This is worth repeating: Make it easy to enroll. Build a 24/7 365 call center to support the trial and ensure that all calls are taken/followed-up. You may need to rebuild websites to improve ease of enrollment and ability to share content with others. Make the experience one that you would appreciate and take ownership of the full experience, not just part of it.

### Magnify the voice of clinical investigators.

Create blog posts and columns for trial investigators. Make sure to interview leading thought leaders locally to reach their audiences and expand impact. Amplify their important role and unlock their insights.

The result is an approach that aligns the audience with the story and not the reverse. With technology and analytics, we can create the experience that we would all want if we, ourselves, were the patients.

*Michael Roth is Head of the Healthcare Practice and Partner at Bliss Integrated Communication. Bob Pearson is Founder and Chair of The Next Practices Group. ○*



Michael Roth



Bob Pearson

## PR news brief

### IPG sells Weber Ireland

Interpublic is selling Weber Shandwick's Ireland operations to local management.

Siobhán Molloy, Managing Director of the business in Ireland, will take over the Dublin-based operation, while Ross Williamson is acquiring the Belfast office in Northern Ireland.

"Operating as an independent agency will provide us with additional opportunities and agility to develop our business in this market while remaining as the Irish partner to the international Weber Shandwick network, which has served us well for the last 20 years," said Molloy.

Weber Shandwick Ireland serves clients such as Amazon Prime, Nestle, Irish Hotels Federation, Ardmore and Ericsson.

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# Women must prioritize preventative care

Communicators can play an instrumental role by inspiring women to take charge of their health.

By Wendy Lund

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to think about health in new ways.

When the stay-at-home orders started, and doctors' offices and hospitals filled with patients in need of urgent care, it may have initially seemed safer to delay or reschedule routine checkups and screenings. Even the medical community sent mixed messages early on, advising people to keep only critical appointments and suggesting that non-essential cancer screenings be postponed.

Now—approximately six months into this global health crisis—the medical community is predicting a rise in cancer rates due to preventative screenings that've fallen through the cracks during the shutdown.

Troubled by this news and recognizing the potential long-term implications it could have for health systems, GCI Health and HealthyWomen teamed up in July to explore how women were approaching their preventative care during the pandemic. This next phase of #BeHealthiHer, which launched in 2017 in partnership with *Prevention* magazine, is focused on making health a priority for women across generations by reminding them that taking care of yourself isn't selfish.

To understand how many women were delaying or missing important appointments, GCI Health, HealthyWomen and *Prevention* conducted a survey, *Stay Healthy in 2020*, which revealed that the preventative care issue had deeper roots than anticipated. The majority of women (70 percent) weren't getting regular screenings for health conditions like cancer and heart disease, even before the onset of COVID-19.

Fueled by these findings, #BeHealthiHer Now is issuing a call-to-action to reinforce the urgency and importance of preventative care and encourage more women to focus on their immediate health and book appointments for screenings.

*Stay Healthy in 2020* looked into what was keeping women from scheduling the preventative screenings they need to maintain good health and found three primary factors trending across all ages and races. One in four women noted that healthcare costs or lack of insurance were the main barriers, especially for Black women, reinforcing significant racial disparities in access to preventative care.

An additional 25 percent of women said they didn't think preventative screenings were necessary for them, with the highest numbers (41 percent) among women ages 65 to 74, a group highly likely to need screenings.

Women also cited schedules packed with family and work obligations, with the highest numbers (38 percent) among 18- to 24-year-olds. This reinforced findings from previous #BeHealthiHer surveys, in which most women (77 percent) said their job schedule prevented them from booking regular screenings, and those working in healthcare marketing and communications fields reported strikingly high levels of stress.

In addition to uncovering barriers to preventative care at the individual level, the Stay Healthy survey also provided insights into broader trends that could impact women's health in 2020 and beyond. While telemedicine has made it possible to connect virtually with doctors and care teams, the remote health platform also poses hurdles for some women.

Appointments that don't require diagnostic tests can easily be adaptable to telehealth, but in-person visits are still necessary for many preventative care screenings, such as mammograms, gynecologic screenings, colonoscopies, blood work and blood pressure monitoring.

Further, the survey found that women's levels of comfort navigating telemedicine varied by age and generation. While many women (42 percent) have engaged with telehealth, the highest group was those between the ages of 18 and 24 (57 percent), with the lowest numbers (36 percent) among those over 75. In the younger group, 65 percent felt they got the same quality of care compared to in-person visits, while only 45 percent of the women over 75 felt that way.

Mental health emerged as another area for concern, with 36 percent of women surveyed saying they have increased their alcohol consumption since the start of the pandemic. Given the link between alcohol consumption and certain cancers and health conditions, there's reason to be concerned about whether these could manifest without regular health screenings.

Overall, the biggest mental health concern was worry over someone in their family getting the virus (23 percent), consistent with our previous findings that women are

putting themselves after everyone else. The lowest concern was being stressed about a health condition that could have been prevented or treated differently (three percent), which further indicates women are not concerned about missing preventative care.

On a more positive note, the arrival of a vaccine for COVID-19 could potentially help restore some semblance of normal life. Many of the women (58 percent) surveyed said they plan to get the vaccine as soon as it becomes available, including 64 percent of women over 55 and 74 percent of those between 18 and 24.

However, given the pharmaceutical industry's speed in developing a viable vaccine, the window to generate support for universal vaccination is relatively small and closing quickly. If enough people aren't vaccinated, the public health gains could be much smaller than expected. This will require ongoing education, encouragement and engagement across the healthcare industry.

Despite all the uncertainty in the world today, #BeHealthiHer Now wants to remind women that when it comes to taking charge of their health and holding their loved ones accountable to doing the same, there's no better time than the present.

The goal is to provide tips, inspiration and expert advice to help them get healthier, stay healthier and live more vital lives. For example, many women may not be aware of the screenings they should be getting at what age. #BeHealthiHer Now is offering resources to remind women when the right time is to get important screenings for conditions such as hypertension, various types of cancers, thyroid disease and bone mineral density.

As communicators, we can play an important role in raising awareness about the necessity of preventative care and inspiring women to prioritize self-care, for themselves, for their families and for society. It's time that more women realize that taking care of themselves is as important as taking care of others and put themselves at the top of their list of priorities.

Wendy Lund is CEO of GCI Health. **○**



Wendy Lund



An aerial photograph showing a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. To the right of the road is a calm body of water, likely a lake or a wide river, reflecting the sky. The road has white lane markings and a yellow center line. The forest is lush and green, with some trees showing early autumn colors. The overall scene is serene and natural.

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# Widening the focus in COVID-19 research

Healthcare communications plays a critical role in our road to normalcy as we search for a COVID-19 vaccine.

By Mark Senak

After months of social distancing—and for many, economic distancing as well—and with over 200,000 Americans dead and many more ill and infected, people are understandably craving liberation from the COVID-19 pandemic and a return to normalcy. But, in fact, the only obvious means to that end is one where the population achieves “herd immunity,” where so many people become immunized that the virus has nowhere left to go.

Herd immunity can be achieved only in one of three ways: one, millions upon millions get infected and we suffer with a high level of associated mortality; two, a large portion of the population gets vaccinated; and three, a combination of the two. The least costly to human life by far is the second. It's also the most difficult to achieve.

Under normal circumstances, a true medical breakthrough doesn't require a great deal of prompting and promoting to drive use by the affected population. Take the AIDS epidemic: after a decade and a half without any effective treatment for HIV disease, protease inhibitors and other antivirals were swiftly adopted upon arrival and brought dramatic change to a bleak circumstance.

But a COVID-19 vaccine faces particular hurdles to adoption. Sure, there's the vocal anti-vaccination movement working in the background, but the challenges for a COVID-19 vaccine are even greater than for other vaccines. People who would normally be vaccinated are skeptical for myriad reasons including distrust of the pharmaceutical industry, concern over the speed at which COVID-19 vaccines are being developed and, very importantly, the profound political interference in the process that has undermined credibility and confidence in the principle organizations charged with protecting public health.

All this means that the challenge we face on our road to normalcy isn't only a scientific one, but one in which highly effective communications must play an essential role.

As with any public health effort, one can readily divide the stakeholder audience into three groups. First are those who will not be convinced under any circumstances to take a vaccine. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are anxiously waiting in line for the vaccine now (including the tens of

thousands who have participated in the sizable clinical trials now underway). And in the middle are those who are cautious and concerned, those who are prone to wait and see what happens. This middle group is the key audience that we must focus all our time and resources on.

Right now, the focus on this critical audience is, at best, fuzzy. In the past few weeks, there have been several surveys with varied outcomes defining the population's intent to take a vaccine when one becomes available. In early August, a Gallup poll was published that said one in three Americans would not get a vaccine; in mid-August NBC published a survey that said less than half would get a vaccine; and in the first week of September, CBS published a survey that said that only one in five would get a vaccine as soon as possible. These findings should alarm us all. We need to know much more about what these millions of hesitant people are thinking and feeling. We should know them better than we have known any audience. And we should know what the most convincing and persuasive messages are and who should be delivering them.

With respect to the “who,” we already have some insights. According to the annual Gallup poll that ranks the regard the public has for various sectors, it isn't the pharmaceutical industry and it isn't government: both rank poorly and have for two years in a row. Yes, the healthcare industry has experienced a bump in reputation this year for the first time according to Gallup, but it's all relative. And the lack of credibility of government—including the FDA and CDC—has only been exacerbated by political circumstances as evidenced by recent news reports of pressure brought to bear on CDC to restrict content and question science by political appointees in the Trump Administration.

It's increasingly clear that the white coats may also be the white hats in this mix.

In addition to the messenger comes the question of the medium. Social media and influencers—“people like me”—have greater sway on the outlook of individuals than news from institutional sources. The role of social media platforms—and of strategies—is obvious in political campaigns and should be no less obvious in a campaign to get people onboard with vaccination.

In short, for all of the billions that have

been invested in research and development of a COVID-19 vaccine—the pathway to our normalcy—there must also be large investments in the science behind the art of communications. This investment can't wait until the vaccine arrives. Research should be taking place now into the key audience who needs to be engaged. The effort will have to involve not only skilled strategists in communications but will also require the coalescence of many healthcare stakeholders: medical societies, providers, payers and patient organizations. Moreover, it will take a sustained campaign that masterfully utilizes social media strategies, both paid and organic.

We can't afford to see the trend in surveys on vaccination continue on the current trajectory. There must be coordinated planning now and flawless execution as we head into even stiffer political headwinds, or else the investment made in research and development is at risk, and, as a result, our pathway to normalcy detoured.

Mark Senak is a Senior Vice President and Partner in FleishmanHillard's Global Healthcare Practice. ○



Mark Senak

## Media news brief

### Fox News slices almost 3% of workers

Fox News is restructuring its business operations, a move that will trim almost three percent of its workforce.

“As Fox News Media has evolved into a streamlined multi-platform organization, we are realigning several functions and restructuring various divisions in order to position all of our businesses for ongoing success,” the network said in a statement.

No cuts will be made to on-air talent.

Deadline reports the cutbacks due to COVID-19 are on the hair and make-up department.

Guests will no longer receive makeup and hair services; only anchors and contributors will because of concerns over safety amid the pandemic.

Fox Corp. suffered a 73.3 percent decline in Q4 (ended June) net to \$122M on a four percent dip in revenues to \$2.4 billion.

Ad revenues fell 22 percent at the FOX Television Stations. There also were fewer live events at FOX Sports and fewer hours of scripted programming at FOX Entertainment due to the pandemic.

CEO Lachan Murdoch remains upbeat. “We entered the COVID-19 crisis on sound operational and financial footing and we expect to emerge from this pandemic more competitive, more focused and even more strongly positioned to deliver value for our viewers, partners and shareholders in the years ahead,” he said.



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# Beyond COVID-19: health's defining moment for trust

As healthcare companies around the world work at breakneck speed to uncover solutions for COVID-19, they're simultaneously embarking on a pivotal moment that could ultimately transform long-term trust in an industry often challenged reputationally.

By Courtney Gray Haupt

2020 marks the 20th year Edelman has studied trust across institutions; it's also a year significantly marked by the global pandemic, with many more questions currently than answers about the future of the world and the future of health. And yet, the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update: Trust and the COVID-19 Pandemic found that, surprisingly, trust in institutions broadly—and healthcare specifically—increased globally.

The January 2020 study found that in the U.S., only 56 percent said they trust the healthcare sector to “do what is right.” In May 2020, that number skyrocketed to 74 percent. Trust levels in healthcare subsectors in the U.S. also increased, in some areas quite dramatically from earlier in the year: 78 percent trust hospitals, an eight-point increase; 62 percent trust insurance, a 15-point increase; 69 percent trust biotech, 14-point increase. Though trusted by fewer people when compared to the other health subsectors, pharma at 64 percent trust had the largest increase—a record-breaking 26-point gain from January.

Digging deeper into the trust increase in pharmaceutical and biotech companies, Edelman conducted a separate U.S.-based study in May 2020, through our proprietary Edelman Trust Management research platform. Among the findings were that eight in ten Americans believe the United States won't make it through the pandemic without pharmaceutical and biotech companies playing a critical role.

Clearly, all eyes are on healthcare to provide solutions during this unprecedented public health crisis. Yet this increased level of trust is no doubt joined with increased expectations of how healthcare companies—and particularly pharma and biotech—will behave both now and in the future. In addition to understanding what is expected of them, healthcare companies will need to clearly communicate how expectations will be met and the actions they are committed to taking.

What we also have seen, based on our 20 years of Trust Barometer research, is that maintaining double-digit increases in trust is tenuous and often unsuccessful. In fact, sharp rises in trust like those documented in the past six months are often followed by a significant loss in trust the following year. These massive trust gains are a promising opportunity for the healthcare industry,

though positive sentiments are not likely to remain without sustained and long-term action.

Edelman data from several separate studies this year has helped shine a light on what healthcare companies can do to safeguard their trust gains, especially in three key areas:

## Empathy drives research

The 2020 ETM study found seven in ten Americans trust pharmaceutical and biotech companies to tell the truth about COVID-19 and how they're working to address it. However, more than half view current communications as “too corporate” and “lacking in empathy.” While scientists and researchers are working tirelessly to bring large-scale societal solutions to the pandemic, executives and institutional leaders need to focus on bringing empathy back to the discussion. This can be done by:

- Showing real world impact through the stories of employees—like researchers, scientists, patient advocates, front line workers—who are spending their days dedicated to protecting patients and public health.
- Convening patient advocacy groups and community leaders for meaningful and transparent dialogue about community needs and localized challenges and solutions.
- Instituting regular CEO live check-ins on social media to answer common questions from the public.
- Clearly communicating efforts to protect employees' mental, physical and financial wellbeing during the pandemic and beyond.

## Balancing politics with public health

The Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: “Workplace Trust and the Coronavirus,” fielded in August 2020, found that in the U.S., there's a clear political divide in trusting the recommendations of public health authorities. When asked about actions required to keep workplaces safe from the spread of COVID-19, 63 percent of Democrats agreed on the mandatory use of masks while only 44 percent of Republicans said the same. On a broader scale, Democrats were more likely to say they would take a government-approved COVID-19 vaccine than Republicans, at 64 percent vs 59 percent respectively. With the political divide likely only to increase as the U.S. Presidential election nears, a

focus on facts-driven, bipartisan communications led by trusted institutional voices will be critical. For example:

- Partnering with local governments in high-risk communities on public health education and awareness efforts.
- Highlighting cross-industry and public-private collaboration efforts to reinforce commitment to public health and pandemic solutions.

Heading into 2021, healthcare organizations will need to navigate the evolving regulatory and policy landscape with trust-driving solutions that transcend politics to address access and health disparities as well as the importance of science and innovation.

## Solutions aren't just COVID-specific

Making a COVID-19 vaccine, test or treatment is not a requirement for being perceived as contributing meaningfully to health solutions, our 2020 ETM study found. Meaningful and impactful efforts are judged based on other critical societal need. Case in point: there's substantial concern with ensuring those who have chronic health conditions, outside of COVID-19, are still receiving the necessary care. Employee welfare, community support, transparency, in addition to pandemic resources, are all expected. Ways healthcare companies may showcase their impact to communities include:

- Donating life-saving medications to community clinics or technology to high-risk populations who would benefit from telemedicine.
- Conducting local media tours with organization leaders and researchers to disseminate high-quality, reliable information based on localized data.
- Creating and promoting access programs to ensure those in high-risk populations are able to receive both the treatment and care needed.

Expectations are much higher as a result of the pandemic, and a majority believe that pharma/biotech are pivoting faster and more effectively to address the situation. But, a short-term, narrow focus



Courtney Gray Haupt

— Continued on next page

# Empathy-driven brands reimagine the selling model

Traditional insight methodologies and selling strategies often miss eliciting an emotional connection with customers. Challenging this oversight is critical for brands engaging with healthcare pros as they face massive disruption. Taking a moment to listen, and demonstrating empathy, is the right thing to do for customers and your business.

By Blake Schiller

**H**ow do you feel? Seriously, how do you feel? A confluence of economic, political, societal and educational disruptions—to name a few—are present in everyone's life at the moment. Now, more than ever, the question of "how you feel" is incredibly relevant. We, as leaders in marketing, advertising and PR, ask this to preserve ourselves and persevere.

We also ask "how do you feel" of others to demonstrate empathy and offer support: to family members, friends and colleagues especially. But have we asked or thought about how customers feel? Conducting market research with customers about the disruptions they're facing, or combing through analyst observations on the subject isn't earnestly understanding them.

According to "Consumer.ology," a book by consumer behavior expert Philip Graves, traditional market research actually violates basic neuroscience on human consciousness and lacks the empathy necessary to uncover the authentic truth within customers.

Instead, at imre Health, we champion taking a moment to listen. To understand customers by mining the head, the heart and the gut. Traditional insights and strategy rely too heavily on the head—the rational being. But customer beliefs and decisions are also unconsciously emotional (the heart) and instinctive (the gut). The customer-type most in need of marketing, advertising and PR leaders who listen are healthcare professionals. Is there an economic sector more disrupted than the practice of healthcare? I'll wait.

Consider this: An April PCC survey found that primary care physicians are facing more challenges than ever amid COVID-19:

- 51 percent of primary-care providers are uncertain about their financial future.
- 80 percent have added new platforms

that require extra training.

- 84 percent are experiencing severe and continuous stress.

These are new realities every specialty faces, and as a result, the practice of medicine is rapidly changing at scale. One by-product of these dynamics are permanently closing doors to Pharma and Biotech sales forces. Time is the commodity HCPs are after, and according to findings shared by pharmpforum, they don't have it for traditional sales forces any longer.

- 30-40 percent of specialists don't want to have any engagement with the pharmaceutical industry any longer.

- In primary care settings, fewer than 50 percent of general practitioners want to see a representative, even by video.

Even where opportunities exist to engage HCPs, the perception is that the industry is doing it poorly. Simply put, Pharma and Biotech are not evolving at the same pace as the practice of medicine.

- 42 percent of providers cannot think of a pharma manufacturer that has effective virtual/digital selling capabilities, according to research shared by Ipsos in April.

Bottom line: traditional selling models in Pharma and Biotech are eroding because of the COVID-19 shutdown. Realistically, they may never look the same, as the practice of healthcare adjusts to "new normal" in lieu of manufacturers. Similarly, non-personal promotion or digital models aren't gaining traction because HCP customer attention cannot be afforded to industry platforms that are increasingly fragmented. Now, more than any other time, commercial executives in Pharma and Biotech must reimagine the future of engagement with HCP customers to drive relationships and sales.

So, what's being done? At imre Health we keep hearing the question, "How can we deploy our sales force more effectively

in a virtual setting?" or "How do I connect patients with critical resources like samples or education if my reps can't call on offices?" Those are Blockbuster questions. Not "blockbuster drugs"; I'm talking about Blockbuster, the VHS rental company infamous for not innovating when it needed to. Kicking itself for allowing Netflix to enter and disrupt the market. The hallmark of these questions, and companies who fail to innovate, is inward rational thinking. Instead, we need to ask ourselves a Netflix question, with a reimagined future that's empathetic toward customers. It sounds something like this, "How do I create value for my customers through my brand/company by not being disruptive to the evolving practice of medicine."

At imre Health, our reimagined future is simple: we must shift from sales to service. imre Health believes that selling is losing impact, so we must enable brands to maintain relevance through service experiences that drive relationships, create value, and enable persistence. Key to this model is compassionate intelligence, which is emerging as a modern core competency for healthcare sales and marketing executives navigating this new normal, as well as an understanding of the HCP omnichannel and virtual experience. Our goal is to add value to physicians' practices, eliminate obstacles for them and help improve patient outcomes.

Reimagined services that can bring this to life include direct-to-physician or patient subscription services, applied science medical education delivered through modern mediums, and extending the HCP's influence to patient homes through virtual care (to name a few).

I ask again: How do you feel? Better yet, how do you feel about the way your brand is showing up in service to customers? Unsure? Optimistic? Pessimistic? We can help you listen and reimagine customer engagement.

Blake Schiller is Executive Vice President at imre Health, the life sciences arm of imre. ○



Blake Schiller

## A DEFINING MOMENT FOR TRUST

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won't bring the long-term impact necessary to truly reshape trust for the healthcare industry, both in the United States and globally. As institutions' brightest medical minds come together to bring us out of this pandemic, their business and communica-

tions leaders need to balance immediate needs with long-term public health goals. Sustained change is needed to ensure this critical moment systematically changes the trust people have in the organizations that spend their days dedicated to advancing public health.

Courtney Gray Haupt is U.S. Health Chair at Edelman. ○

# Leading through awakening, accountability and equity

Leaders within the biotechnology, pharma and healthcare spaces recognize the value in taking a stance on diversity and inclusion issues, but are often uncertain on where to begin.

By Cynthia Isaac

**F**inally, people are paying attention. In the stillness, quiet and anxiety of COVID-19, leaders are being called upon to address immediate needs around systemic racism and inequities in their communities and workplaces. And to do something. Corporate reputation, employee morale and leadership trust is at stake.

## Unequal care creating unjust outcomes

In my field, the business of healthcare, the stakes are higher, and companies accustomed to focusing on symptoms, treatments and outcomes find themselves called to account for undeniable impacts of systemic injustice on the health of the populations they serve.

I know firsthand that workplaces within the biotechnology, pharma and hospital arenas aren't as diverse as they need to be. In the biopharma industry, only 15 percent of executives and 12 percent of CEOs are people of color. Only 30 percent of executives and 16 percent of CEOs are women. The PR and communications offices are no better; data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics from 2019 show that the PR industry itself is 89.8 percent white at the management level.

Institutional privileges, biases and preferences that favor one class of executives are reflected in outcomes. For example, our industry took on cancer and touted its great breakthroughs, and yet the mortality rate for Black women diagnosed with breast cancer is 42 percent higher than the comparable rate for white women.

Advances in care have steadily lowered the total infant mortality rate in the U.S. from 1995 to 2017. And yet, even in 2017, the infant mortality rate for infants of non-Hispanic Black women (10.97) was more than twice as high as for infants of non-Hispanic white (4.67), non-Hispanic Asian (3.78), and Hispanic (5.10) women. Pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births for Black and American Indian and Alaska Native women older than 30 was 4-5 times higher than it is for white women.

## Looking inward before acting outwardly

Nearly all executives in healthcare recognized the necessity of taking a position on diversity and inclusion during the recent protests for racial equity. They saw the need for change, but the tentative steps they took reflected their uncertainty

about how to proceed. Our own top-line review of leading pharmaceutical company responses in social media to BLM and George Floyd protests from late May to July 2020 revealed that:

- Only about a third of content from pharma companies had an executive as the carrier of the DE&I message; most were general social media posts.
- Few pharma companies tied social justice posts directly back to healthcare.
- Only a fifth of mentions on social media had a connection to healthcare lines of business, health education or health inequities.
- Few linked concrete steps companies are taking to pursue social justice.
- Less than a third of pharma's social justice posts were about taking concrete actions to improve DE&I in workplace or healthcare outcomes.

Most organizations are eager to engage with and communicate on behalf of their employees and the communities they serve. Many leaders, however, are unclear on where to start and fear getting it wrong. This comes in part from the realization that the nature of leadership is intertwined with the embedded injustice itself; the homogeneity of c-suites is well-recognized.

As companies and organizations tackle this important issue, here are three considerations:

First, evaluate where you are as an organization in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion journey. We saw in our clients a range of engagement levels within their own companies and leadership teams, fitting into four categories:

**Disengaged.** From the outside, these companies appear unresponsive to DE&I issues in society and lack diverse representation among their leadership.

**Awakened.** These companies behave reactively to social issues, articulating a need for change – but not a plan.

**Active.** These are engaged in some level of tracking of diversity and in measuring the impact of DE&I programs.

**Leading.** Companies that usually have established and robust DE&I initiatives in place, and participate in cross-industry engagements on DE&I issues.

Second, envision your goal. We recommend starting with a prompt assessment

of your stakeholders' biggest needs versus company actions to identify where you can make an impact as an organization.

Quick pulse surveys, social media analyses and advocacy relationships can all fuel insight into DE&I commitments and proposed messaging. Use those outputs to close the gap between where the company is and where it wants to be, identifying strategies for immediate and longer-term wins based on company ethos and stakeholder needs.

Third, bring in the experts. As we tackle some of society's most challenging and sensitive issues, we need



Cynthia Isaac

advice from people who are part of these communities, who have engaged their organizations and worked to align their company leadership behind DE&I commitment. We also need expertise from arenas outside of healthcare—from media, technology, finance, academia, non-profit and government—to provide diverse perspectives and expert advice with real world insights. That's why at Syneos Health, we're putting together a cross-functional advisory council to tap the brain power of a cadre of experts to help move our clients' positive intentions into potent action. We facilitate workshop-style sessions where leaders and these advisors can co-create solutions to reach corporate DE&I goals. The output is a plan that's creative, adaptable and focused on solving your most critical needs by forging unique partnerships and embracing your most important stakeholders.

## Responding today, reshaping tomorrow

The biopharmaceutical industry is working to save lives threatened by COVID-19, and I know that science and medicine will create the solutions we need. As healthcare leaders, we have the opportunity to drive overdue social change to improve outcomes and public health long after the pandemic has passed. The world is paying attention. Let's use our voices and influence for good.

*Cynthia Isaac, Ph.D., is Head of the Corporate Communications Practice at Syneos Health Communications. ○*





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# An audience-first approach to media activation

Why capturing audiences and building credibility and communities should be integral parts of a brand's integrated communications program.

By Emily Poe and Chuck Hemann

If you're an integrated communications professional, raise your hand if you've heard the following question from your boss or client: "We have a big product announcement coming up. Can we get a press release ready?" I'm assuming a great many of you have heard that in your career. If we also asked you to raise your hand if you've been asked to author a tweet, blog post or Facebook update, I bet we'd capture almost everyone reading this article. The reality is, though, that the role of integrated communications has changed. It's inclusive of earned, social and paid media. The rumors of one media channel becoming less important are greatly exaggerated.

Before we begin dissecting the roles of earned, social and paid media, it's important to take a step back and understand what drives the success of integrated communications. Ultimately, the key to success is to understand audiences well enough to effectively reach them "where they are" in order to generate the desired action. This means leveraging the right analytics that help define who the right audience is and who/what influences them, what content is resonating, what language drives action and behavior change and what channels those audiences are going to for information and community.

Starting with an understanding of the audiences and where they are in their journey, we can develop an integrated media activation plan that leverages the inherent value of earned, social and paid media. Each of these types of media can deliver uniquely for a company or brand and should be used together. What's the value of each to an integrated communications program? We think it's in building credibility, communities and audiences.

For many communicators, securing earned media placements has long been the gold standard of generating awareness. It's true that effective earned media provides credibility to an organization or brand. Earned media relies on a third party—the reporter—to determine if a news story is important enough to share with their audience, their readers, listeners or viewers. Earned media, though, also carries real and inherent risk because a reporter may decide a topic isn't worthy of a story or may paint a company or brand in an unflattering light or quote a source who takes an opposing perspective.

Beyond that, it's no secret that trust of media outlets in the United States has become polarized based on party lines, and earned media is reliant on—and, in the best case, builds—credibility. The Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel examined U.S. levels of trust in 30 major news sources between Oct. and Nov. 2019, with the survey showing that Democrats trust most major news sources whereas Republicans distrust most major outlets, and that the polarization and divide have grown in recent years.

While this isn't surprising if you've been paying close attention to the trends, it does mean that to reach and affect a broad audience, communicators also need to deliver messages and content in places where audiences are already going for information: frequently, to social channels they consider their digital communities. Social media is critical to bringing brand content into communities where audiences are already sharing and discussing related information, or to create a new community where one doesn't yet exist. Understanding where and how content is being shared authentically on channels is critical to driving conversations that are supportive of a company or

brand. A critical element is understanding where and how influencers can be enrolled to share information or to weigh in on an issue. While organic social isn't dead, it's true that communicators need to know where paid content, social ads or a formal influencer marketing campaign can boost message delivery.

For most marketers—and now communicators—paid media is a critical tool because it allows them to acutely target their messages to their audience(s). The successful execution of paid media can deliver several things for a company or brand:

- Allows for the successful amplification of earned and social media content targeted at desired audiences.
- Leveraging paid media provides communicators the ability to "capture" audiences for marketing in the future.
- Creates an extension of a news cycle beyond an initial press release.
- Drives critical traffic to branded properties—the "owned media" in the PESO model—so the audience can learn more about the company or brand.
- Allows for the delivery of a highly-personalized message that is most likely to generate the desired action.

Whether standing alone—not ideal—or serving as a critical ingredient to earned and social programs, paid media is no longer simply nice to have. It's a must-have for communicators.

Ultimately, an effective audience-first approach leverages what each type of activation can deliver, building credibility and generating awareness through earned media, creating communities or delivering content to those that already exist on social channels, and capturing audiences and their attention with paid content.

Emily Poe is Chief Integration Officer at W2O. Chuck Hemann is Integrated Intelligence Practice Lead at W2O. ○



Emily Poe



Chuck Hemann

## PR news brief

### Trader Joe's, AAA ranked most authentic brands

Trader Joe's, AAA, Samsung, USAA and Target came out on top in Escalent's newly released Brand Authenticity Index.

Escalent, a human behavior and analytics firm, evaluated 32 top brands from the consumer and retail, financial services, technology and telecom industries, measuring each brand on five dimensions that it says predict and diagnose a brand's authenticity: thoughtful, transparent, reliable, committed and socially aware.

The result, based on a national survey of 1,000 consumers aged 18 and older from May 5 to 7, is intended to provide a data-driven, composite look at what it takes to win over consumers and engender strong brand loyalty through genuine messaging and action in alignment with intrinsic brand values.

"The companies that performed well in our initial surveys go beyond the talk—they live and breathe their values," said Jill Miller, Vice President of Escalent's consumer & retail practice. "These five companies have won consumers over with their words and actions."



# The biopharma communications balancing act

**Nuanced skills are prerequisites for success as companies move from development to commercialization.**

By Donna L. LaVoie

**A**re there differences in managing communications and strategic communications/IR across all industries? Are the basic skills that you would apply to other industries transferable to biotechnology?

The Chief Communications Officer's job in any industry consists of several key elements including broad communications and horizon management, message shaping and stakeholder analysis, conference planning and attendance as well as engaging with media and investors, advocacy/professional societies and more. A survey of CCOs from different sectors would demonstrate many similarities in the function. That said, however, biotech communications are an exception.

All biotech companies require substantial capital to fund product development and are subject to Food and Drug Administration regulation. Obviously, companies in all industries need access to capital, but biotechs generally burn millions of dollars in research and development of a product over a five-to-ten-year timeframe, often without a successful product in the end. Capital is one of the key components to their success. Luckily, 2020 is a record peak year for initial public offerings with listings the highest in a ten-year span, other than 2015.

In biotech, general company positioning and branding are very important along with financial messaging for commercial companies that have FDA approved products on the market. For the majority that don't, the emphasis is many times on cash position, level of R&D spending and pipeline progress. The financial metrics are often secondary to the inherent strengths of the company's future product pipeline and the markets it will serve. So, the CCO's expertise focuses on articulation of the company's technology, people, problem and solution to the problem ladder up to the business model of the company and its clinical, regulatory and commercialization strategy.

For emerging companies—which many biotechs are—the CFO may handle communications, because much of the task relates to a company's communications with the financial community. This evolves over time as the company moves into later stages of clinical development toward commercialization.

Often, the CEO or a top scientist may also be available for day-to-day communi-

cations about scientific, clinical or medical content. In effect, any of these individuals serve as the company's chief spokesperson.

This isn't typical of companies that have products on the market and in-house marketing functions. The job requires an integration of experience in investor relations, public relations, corporate communications and an understanding of the regulatory process with good relationships with media, investors and more. The role can also include interactions with other communications, marketing, and IR officers at pharmaceutical companies with which the company has partnerships. This can be tricky and often requires involvement of legal counsel and executive management.

When a biotech company matures and becomes an operating company, the communications functions usually split. At that point, the skills required are more traditional ones of most product companies with broader needs.

Many think that if communications officers possess the required marketing and financial skills, they can perform the function in any industry. However, the nuances of the complex communications strategies, messaging and tactics are different in biotech. This is because a biotech company's story is event-driven, based on things such as a partnership with a pharmaceutical company, new platform technologies or the release of complex clinical data.

Almost everything is material to these companies, and the release of scientific and clinical information is tricky. It's especially challenging in a Reg FD environment. When you don't have earnings, there are many gray areas where the regulations aren't specific. Many companies file 8Ks with the SEC whenever developments arise, even attaching copies of scientific or clinical presentations.

As with most companies these days, biotech's webcast almost any group meeting that includes members of the financial community. This is sometimes viewed unfavorably by large pharmaceutical partners, whose primary interests are often focused on the release of data at a major medical meeting.

In the past, I've found our agency in the middle of this delicate balancing act. The pharmaceutical company is considering how the medical community will perceive the data and the biotech company, while having interests in medical peer review,

wants to get the message out to the financial community to support the stock or to simply comply with Reg FD disclosure.

Companies also need to balance the need to communicate with the constraints of FDA oversight. Thus, an understanding of life sciences and biotech in addition to an understanding of the regulatory process are needed if you're going to communicate successfully to the Street and keep your company out of trouble with the FDA and the SEC. Indeed, there's a select group of institutional investors with MDs and PhDs on staff to sift through a company's product pipeline, technology platform and clinical data. The COO must speak their language.



Donna L. LaVoie

What's clear is that biotech communications require unique attributes like an understanding of the regulatory process and an ability to articulate a scientific and clinical/commercial story. As biotechs continue to mature into development-stage companies with products entering the market, financial skills and/or broader strategic communications skills become more important. At this point, there are lessons to be learned from the larger biotech and pharmaceutical companies.

*Donna L. LaVoie is President and CEO of LaVoieHealthScience. ●*

## PR news brief

### W2O acquires Elysia Group

W2O, the No. 1 ranked independent healthcare PR firm, has acquired Elysia Group, an economic and outcomes research outfit based in New York.

Elysia, which has offices in Taipei and Shanghai, provides modeling approaches to help pharmaceutical and medical device companies gauge cost-effectiveness, market sizing, forecasting and portfolio analysis.

Bruce Wang, Elysia CEO/co-founder, and Wesley Furnback, President/Co-Founder, join W2O as health economics and real-world evidence-practice leaders.

They report to Rita Glaze, W2O's commercial strategy and market access practice leader.

Elysia will work closely with W2O's Discern Health unit, which counsels clients on performance measures and innovative payment models that shape the market for their products and services.

"The collective expertise and capabilities of Elysia and Discern enable us to help clients plan for and execute their commercial and market access strategies at greater quality and depth than ever before," said Glaze.

The Elysia deal is W2O's seventh acquisition since it announced a partnership in 2019 with New Mountain Capital.

W2O registered \$218.9M in healthcare fees in 2019, according to O'Dwyer's ranking of PR firms.

# COVID-19 in nursing homes: a true crisis challenge

A look into the unprecedented communications challenges faced by the nursing home industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By David Ball

Nursing homes have a long history of negative news coverage, some of it justified, following incidents of elder abuse or patient neglect or financial malfeasance. But plenty of it stems from the social stigma attached to the place where many live out their last days far from the comforts of home and the company of family. Prompted by the public's (mis)perceptions, the media frequently looks for what's wrong with nursing homes and rarely for what's right.

Against this backdrop came the coronavirus pandemic, the greatest challenge ever faced by the profession. Not only was this a healthcare challenge, but it was a communications challenge of enormous proportions.

Savvy nursing home administrators and operators recognized the dawning crisis and sought help from PR pros to handle the sudden influx of media inquiries, so they could focus on the core task at hand of saving lives. Others balked and bore the brunt of bad news headlines. Regardless, it quickly became clear that nursing homes needed to strengthen their communications to better inform worried families and other concerned stakeholders, in order to preserve their reputation.

## The crisis unfolds

Nursing homes in many regions were ravaged by COVID-19 during the initial outbreak from March to June, despite concerted infection control efforts and public health protocols that evolved as more became known about the spread of the virus. While facility staff helped many residents recover from the disease, the public and the media often blamed them for jeopardizing the health of residents.

In reality, in many respects, the pandemic was the skilled nursing profession's finest hour. They fought relentlessly against the spread of the virus, despite years of below-cost reimbursement from state Medicaid agencies, which pay for the care of the majority of nursing home residents. These buildings were simply never designed or envisioned to be a front line of pandemic defense.

Yet as their staff worked at great personal risk to protect and care for their vulnerable residents, the media focused on the heroics happening inside America's hospitals, while pinning the death toll on nursing homes. No, there would be no spinning the data on the high numbers of COVID infections and deaths that nursing homes were required

to report to health departments and that were subsequently disclosed in government press conferences; but there was more to the story than just those cold, hard facts.

## Prioritize communication

Our firm worked with some 20 nursing homes during the brunt of the pandemic, responding to an urgent need from current clients and new crisis PR clients alike. They needed assistance not only with managing a flood of inbound media inquiries, but more importantly to communicate with worried families and other concerned stakeholders.

The crisis gave us an opportunity to apply and tailor crisis communications fundamentals to ensure that administrators could prioritize the health and safety of their residents and staff, all while better positioning their facilities for a post-COVID-19 recovery.

Job one for nursing homes was to keep families informed of COVID cases in the facility where their loved ones lived and received care. After the pandemic hit, nursing homes were closed to visitors. Families were cut off, left on the outside looking in, and understandably concerned.

Some family members that felt left in the dark turned to public officials and the media to find answers, and their heart-wrenching stories ended up on the evening news or in the next day's paper. We advised our clients to communicate frequently with families, whether by email, letter, phone call or even text message. Many nursing homes posted COVID-19 updates to their websites, the more frequent the better.

The messages were direct and transparent, noting the rates of infections and tragic losses while reinforcing the common theme that they were working as hard as possible to keep residents and staff safe. It was important for family members to understand that they would have updated information as soon as it became available—that they'd be the first to know about developments in the building.

Sometimes staff members turned into sources for reporters digging deeper into the COVID story at nursing homes. Employees were worried about getting sick and troubled by the scarcity of testing resources. The message from the employers emphasized that their safety was paramount and that they would be protected to the greatest extent possible. We recommended regular meetings and updates for all team members.

## A media onslaught

Healthcare communicators have had an outsized role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Robust communications teams supporting public health officials, hospitals and drug manufacturers were quick to spring into action. The news cycle was saturated by the spread of coronavirus.

Nursing homes became a singular target of the media, unfortunately, because they accounted for a large percentage of all COVID-related fatalities. They're home to aging, infirm individuals who need specialized, round-the-clock, long-term care. Their residents are extremely vulnerable on a good day, let alone when a novel, deadly virus silently invades a community.

With enterprising reporters from local weeklies, aggressive anchors from metro TV news stations and seasoned journalists from national media outlets all aggressively covering the nursing home angle of the pandemic, our team went into crisis PR overdrive. It was important for us to gather information as quickly as possible from the chaotic environments our clients were working through. When holding statements no longer held, we fielded reporters' questions so that our clients could remain focused on the task at hand.

We also pushed to change the media narrative about nursing homes that was demoralizing to the hardworking staff and leadership of nursing homes. Why were hospital nurses featured in all of the touching stories about healthcare heroes? Why were nursing homes portrayed as perpetrators in the pandemic when they were really victims of the virus?

We prepared an executive of one nursing home for a lengthy interview with the daily paper of record to demonstrate that facility's commitment to quality care. We arranged for feature coverage of a staff chaplain who held the hands of residents as they passed away and became ill herself with COVID-19. We followed up with reporters to debunk bad information and to educate them about what nursing homes were really experiencing behind their closed doors. We



David Ball

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# Communications and the body language of healthcare

If our industry has learned anything this year, it's that communications needs to lead.

By David Jarrard

Society has been challenged by wave after wave of the unknown. Our consultancy focuses exclusively on healthcare organizations—and the physicians, nurses, leaders and other heroes who care for patients—where the questions include: Should I go back to the doctor's office? Whom should I trust, my doctor or my governor? Where can I get real information?

It's been a wakeup call, reminding us that delivering care isn't just about the medical science; it's about creating an environment where people feel safe, cared for and comfortable. That reminder has, in turn, revealed a clear opportunity for healthcare communications: to identify and equip the right messengers and, by doing so, elevating their organizations. And then, to help ensure the operational reality fits with the messages being delivered.

Clinical staff are ideally positioned to deliver both the scientific and emotional messages needed to create this environment. It's needed more now than ever. A recent survey fielded by our firm revealed the public doesn't feel particularly safe in healthcare settings. Whether a doctor's office, hospital, outpatient surgery center, ER or urgent care center, American adults rated their feelings of safety no higher than 5.8 on a 10-point scale. They were also no more likely to return for care in September than they were when we ran a similar survey in April. Furthermore, barely half (53 percent) of people responding to our September survey said they were likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine when available. Clearly, there's work to be done in getting people the care they—and society—need.

What, then, is the role of communications to help people feel comfortable, allay their fears, bring them back and give them a great experience when they arrive?

First, communications teams need to elevate clinical staff to be the key messengers. Our survey showed that nurses and doctors are highly trusted when it comes to delivering information about healthcare. Almost nine out of 10 respondents said they trust clinicians—a markedly higher number than trust in any other group or institution—and a similar proportion said they expect doctors and nurses to be involved in healthcare conversations and educate the public.

This opens up a clear opportunity for communications teams to identify, train and equip clinical staff to become the mes-

sengers for their organizations and leverage the remarkable trust they carry. In this moment, communications teams must be involved in the conversation and push to ensure that leadership isn't just answering the question, "What do we need to say?" but also, "Who needs to say it?" If the "who" is a trusted voice, the message has a good chance of resonating. If not, with uncertainty and even fear running rampant, the message—no matter how important and factually accurate—can be lost.

Second, they can help healthcare providers deliver on the experience they're promising. That entails keeping a watchful eye on corporate body language. We all understand the idea of body language and instinctively know that the wrong body language will drown out the most well-spoken words. The same is true for organizations, especially in healthcare. Every hospital or clinic has body language. And it speaks so much louder than advertising. Or good intentions. Or even a friendly white coat.

We've seen what happens when the body language of a provider isn't right. For instance, when fear of the virus was at its zenith in May, one of my partners walked into a major academic medical center for a gall bladder surgery appointment. After the consult—a "stunningly terrible" experience—she walked out and scheduled her surgery elsewhere. A whole host of "body language" issues had led her to leave: confusing parking, dirty elevators, caution tape across chairs, bad lighting, no evidence of frequent cleaning and more. Maybe most damning was the distinct lack of empathy

and warmth from the individuals she encountered along the way, including the resident and surgeon who conducted the consult, which serves as an example of when clinicians are not appropriately equipped.

If the communications team—whether internal or external—is responsible for the message and equipping the messengers, then it stands to reason that communications must also be heavily involved in ensuring that the message is lived. How an organization presents itself is, at its core, an issue of communications, not just verbal but experiential. Therefore, even if the communications team isn't physically responsible for sanitizing pens, it must be at the table for conversations about how the organization functions while interacting with patients.

As we move away from the acute pandemic phase, the specific operational decisions and communications campaigns will change. But the principal remains: When people interact with a provider, they need to experience the same positive emotions they feel when they hear and see an ad for that provider. Creating that continuum and ensuring that the message and the experience match is a role that communications teams should advocate for and embrace.

David Jarrard is President and Chief Executive Officer of Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock. ●



David Jarrard

## COVID-19 IN NURSING HOMES

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disseminated homegrown photos of nursing home staff delivering Easter baskets dressed not in bunny suits but PPE gowns.

These were all traditional PR tactics, essentially, but they were infinitely more challenging to accomplish successfully amid the onslaught of negative media coverage. There was little daylight in all of the darkness, but we worked hard to shine a light where we could.

### Be a realist and not a dreamer

Our experience working with nursing homes during this crisis has validated what we have long advocated and held to be true: in a crisis, you're better off an eagle than

an ostrich. By realistically assessing the situation, staying focused on your mission, developing messaging targeted to varied audiences and sequencing the communications, you can gain greater control over the situation.

Some facilities took the need to communicate seriously, while others did not fully embrace communicating with their communities. While nobody could blame them, given that they were just trying to keep their heads above water, those that got ahead of the crisis were able to manage public interest and it's those facilities that will be better positioned as the pandemic continues.

David Ball is the President and CEO of Ball Consulting Group, LLC. ●

# O'Dwyer's guide to HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATIONS

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

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

5WPR's diverse client experience includes Sparkling ICE, It's a 10 Haircare, jane iredale, Bowlmor AMF, CheapOAir, L'Oreal, SAP NS2, VIZIO, The Trade Desk, CareerBuilder, Santa Margherita, Topps, Retro Fitness, Welch's, LifeStyles, SodaStream and Zeta Global, among others. Our innovative programs have received recognition and we have won many awards including PR Agency of the Year, PR Executive of the Year, Product Launch of the Year and Business to Business Program of the Year.

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**About Us:** Agency Ten22 is an award-winning, full-service, healthcare IT public relations, content management and digital marketing services firm. Ten22's proven techniques deliver compelling messages, maximize exposure and strengthen market share for healthcare IT and service vendors. Founded in 2005, Agency Ten22 is the most respected media relations agency for small to medium-sized healthcare companies.

**Expertise:** Our team has over 30+ years of healthcare marketing and public relations experience and has worked for healthcare organizations in the past. At Ten22, we have expertise in population health, health information management, payers, hospitals, revenue cycle management, information security, patient experience, telemedicine and more. We build integrated plans to exceed client goals and we adapt quickly to the ever-changing healthcare landscape. From content strategy to media relations and digital marketing, Agency Ten22 is a boutique health IT firm with a customized, hands-on approach. Visit [www.ten22pr.com](http://www.ten22pr.com).

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Ball Consulting Group, LLC is an award-winning, full-service strategic communications firm that specializes in health care, providing proactive public relations services, marketing communications, and crisis planning and management.

Located in the "medical mecca" and "biotech supernova" of Greater Boston, our clients include a broad array of health care organizations, including academic medical centers, biotechnology companies, health IT businesses, pharmaceutical manufacturers, physician organizations, and home health and long-term care providers. We have worked with some of the nation's biggest brands just as we have many startups comprised of smart entrepreneurs bringing a new product to market.

In over 16 years of business, we have built a reputation for providing highly strategic guidance. We support clients through our mastery of media relations, skillful media training, broad thought leadership capabilities, and development and execution of multi-faceted communications plans. We are adept at handling sensitive and complex matters, and we are called upon to deliver valuable counsel and actionable insight, often during the most difficult time in an organization's life cycle.

Getting in our clients' DNA enables us to tell their stories. We serve as a trusted partner that helps organizations to build awareness, strengthen standing, and position themselves for future success.

## BIOSECTOR 2

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**Who we are:** Biosector 2 (B2) is a global healthcare communications agency that partners with visionary clients to deliver groundbreaking programs and improve the health of people's lives. B2's experience as an agency spans virtually every category in the industry and drives strategic solutions for their clients.

**Expertise:** B2 builds brands and grows markets for companies driving innovation across a variety of disease states, and our main goal is to create measurable behavior change for our clients' most important stakeholders. Our capabilities to deliver against this goal go beyond traditional public relations, incorporating issues management, digital & social media, corporate branding, research & analytics, advocacy, patient relations and more. Our dynamic, insightful approach allows us to solve today's problems while uncovering tomorrow's opportunities.

Biosector 2 is part of Syneos Health Communications—we are a healthcare company that does exceptional communications, not a communications company that happens to do healthcare. Our advertising, public relations, medical communications, digital, data science, research and market access specialists have the ability to tap the expertise of clinical and commercial colleagues worldwide to infuse programs with deep therapeutic and analytic insights. We work in scalable, collaborative teams that partner across disciplines and geographies to deliver integrated communications strategies that accelerate brand performance.

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The Bliss Healthcare Practice



represents a mix of *Fortune* 500, established industry players and true disruptors that span the national and global healthcare industry—from healthcare services, health insurance, life sciences, medical and platform technology companies to industry consortia, patient advocates, health educators, third party administrators, and consumer health organizations.

Bliss offers end-to-end communications and marketing solutions that help our clients connect with stakeholders and influencers in the healthcare supply chain, and deliver compelling stories about the science, strategy or technology behind their company or product.

Bliss understands that every client has its own DNA—a unique culture and approach to working with its core constituencies and delivering critical messages in its own way. Bliss works directly with C-suite, marketing, medical and communications executives to gain alignment on their aspirations, identify solutions that create measurable behavior change for critical stakeholders and deliver tangible results. Our clients trust Bliss as a long-term partner to set a strategic communications path and execute new, creative ways to address their business challenges.

Bliss Integrated Communication is truly “integrated.” Not just in name. What sets Bliss apart from other agencies and consultancies? They are both horizontally and vertically integrated and excel at creating the best thought leadership campaigns, with deep understanding of highly regulated subject matter like Medicare, Medicaid, drug and device recalls and warning letters, clinical trial monitoring and information sharing. Bliss’s creative, proprietary approaches to strategic communications allows them to problem solve for our clients, while discovering unique and untapped opportunities. Capabilities include: Drug, diagnostic and medical device launches, corporate communications and C-suite thought leadership, brand and visual identity, clinical trial recruitment/support, content marketing, crisis and issues management, internal communications, data publication support, digital/social media strategy, disease awareness campaigns, measurement/CRM support, media relations and publicity, medical meeting support, online community management (including social), SEO/SEM strategy, stakeholder and influencer mapping, website launches and website maintenance.

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**Services:** Public relations; crisis management; social media; website development; online marketing; branding; public affairs; events; media training.

Boardroom Communications (BoardroomPR) is a full-service public relations and integrated marketing agency, leveraging the skills of our staff of journalists, PR and marketing professionals and multimedia specialists to provide visibility across numerous platforms. Our creative solutions increase awareness and understanding, establish credibility and ultimately improve the brands and businesses of the healthcare companies and brands we have served for three decades.

Representative healthcare clients include hospital systems, physicians practices, surgery and imaging centers, ACOs, physician networks, nursing homes and ALFs, medical societies, surgical device and software companies.

With offices in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Tampa and Naples, we’ve got Florida covered for you.

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Cerrell shares our clients’ commitment to making people healthier and communities stronger. We work with organizations across the healthcare spectrum to develop winning strategies and innovative solutions to tackle complex problems. As the healthcare industry evolves at an increasingly rapid pace, Cerrell continues to deliver results for some of the nation’s largest healthcare organizations, including Providence Health, Dignity/CommonSpirit, PhRMA and Biocom.



The Bliss Integrated Communication team.

**Strategy. Action. Results.** With more than 30 years of experience in healthcare, our diverse team of strategists know how to navigate the complexities of the industry. Cerrell has won statewide ballot measures, facilitated the nation’s largest nonprofit hospital merger and secured multimillion-dollar contracts. We manage advocacy coalitions to impact legislation at all levels of government and navigate our clients through crises to protect their brand.

Healthcare related expertise includes: community outreach, crisis communications and issues management, government relations, labor issue management, lobbying support, mergers and acquisitions, and positive public relations.

## CHAMBERLAIN HEALTHCARE PR

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**Who we are:** Chamberlain Healthcare Public Relations (CHPR) is a dynamic group of savvy and forward-thinking professionals who champion creativity and deliver powerful and impactful communications solutions for our clients. For more than 25

years, CHPR has partnered with a range of clients across the globe committed to improving health and well-being, ranging from large pharmaceutical companies to small biotechs. Through a personalized approach that includes customized teams of industry veterans, we make every client, regardless of size, feel as if they are our only client.

**Expertise:** CHPR simplifies the complex in order to shift behaviors and mindsets. We thoughtfully uncover insights and bring a fresh perspective that allows our clients to seize opportunities and overcome challenges. Our team provides clients with strategic programs—including public relations, digital & social strategy, issues management, research & analytics, and more—designed to break through marketplace noise to reach and inspire stakeholders. Ultimately, our approach delivers results that meet and exceed client objectives and expectations.

CHPR is part of Syneos Health Communications—we are a healthcare company that does exceptional communications, not a communications company that happens to do healthcare. Our advertising, public relations, medical communications, digital, data science, research and market access specialists have the ability to tap the expertise of clinical and commercial colleagues worldwide to infuse programs with deep therapeutic and analytic insights. We work in scalable, collaborative teams that partner across disciplines and geographies to deliver integrated communications strategies that accelerate brand performance.





The opioid epidemic is the deadliest drug crisis in U.S. history, killing 130+ Americans daily. While the epidemic continues to dominate headlines, the conversation neglects to address the surgical gateway to addiction and dependence. Pacira and Coyne PR set out to find real people with real stories who humanize this issue. The result was a moving documentary, **GATEWAY**, which looks at how overprescribing of opioids can lead to downstream consequences.

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**Who we are:** Chandler Chicco Agency (CCA) is a global team of healthcare communications specialists dedicated to helping clients solve their most complex challenges. Integrating an unmatched breadth of resources that enables a comprehensive, 360-degree approach, CCA serves clients that span the spectrum of healthcare from large pharmaceutical companies focused on treatments for major disease areas to emerging specialty companies researching cures for rare diseases; from biotech to devices and diagnostics; as well as healthcare technology, hospitals, non-profits and academic centers.

**Expertise:** CCA sets the standard in delivering best-in-class communications in a collaborative, flexible environment where creativity reigns and clients come first. For more than 20 years, we have achieved this by bringing the right people to the table—innovators, healthcare professionals, thought leaders, advocates,

patients, and loved ones and then building alliances, communities, and champions motivated to act.

CCA is part of Syneos Health Communications—we are a healthcare company that does exceptional communications, not a communications company that happens to do healthcare. Our advertising, public relations, medical communications, digital, data science, research and market access specialists have the ability to tap the expertise of clinical and commercial colleagues worldwide to infuse programs with deep therapeutic and analytic insights. We work in scalable, collaborative teams that partner across disciplines and geographies to deliver integrated communications strategies that accelerate brand performance.

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There is nothing more precious

and personal than the health and well-being of our loved ones, or ourselves. And there is perhaps nothing more personally rewarding than caring for others who are in need. Parents, caregivers, volunteers, medical professionals, researchers, advocates—all share a common purpose: to help people. We share that purpose.

In partnership with our clients, we believe we can guide health journeys and change lives through information, insights and inspiration. Data tells you what's happening, stories tell you why it matters. Research and outcomes can define a new conversation, frame a new perspective, inspire people to think differently, or reveal something that previously has gone unnoticed. Stories cast compelling narratives, capture tales of triumph and can empower people to share their experiences to lift one another in times of need. When it comes to healthcare, you need both: context and connection.

Whether it's driving differentiation at medical meetings, introduc-

ing breakthroughs in patient care, mobilizing grassroots patient advocacy, or activating online influencers, storytelling is at the core of what we do. That's why we get up in the morning.

Because when it comes to health, everything else comes second.

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For more than 40 years, Crosby has helped healthcare clients Inspire Actions That Matter™—actions that positively impact people's lives and make a real difference for individuals, families, and communities.

Crosby's Health Practice serves hospitals and health systems, health plans, physician groups, technology and service providers, senior living companies, health advocacy groups and federal government agencies.

Services include marketing research and planning, brand development, experience design, integrated communications programs, public relations, social media, partner and community mobilization, digital marketing and web development, multicultural outreach, PSAs, and behavior-change campaigns.

Clients include Kaiser Permanente, Shriners Hospitals for Children, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health & Humans Services, the



**Crosby's health practice leaders: Joel Machak, Executive Creative Director; Denise Aube, EVP, Health Practice Leader; Raymond Crosby, President & CEO.**



The Evoke KYNE team, February 2020.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Military OneSource, Qlarant, Refuah Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, and Veterans Health Administration.

Crosby ranks among the top health communications agencies in the country and is a member of the PR Council and American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As). The firm has offices in Maryland's state capital of Annapolis and in Washington, D.C. To see case studies and capabilities, visit [www.crosbymarketing.com](http://www.crosbymarketing.com).

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Crosswind Media & Public Relations is a full-service communications and public relations firm, specializing in helping leaders navigate the intersection of business, government and media through strong brands, effective messaging and compelling public dialogue, creating influential conversations with the stakeholders most important to each organization. We use our combined full-service capabilities and innovative abilities in public relations, traditional and digital media, advocacy, brand enrichment and marketing to negotiate and develop a fully integrated and multi-channel campaign and

strategic plan to create conversations that matter. We believe that by creating purposeful and impactful conversations, we also create pathways that make success accessible for more people, more often. That is why applying our expertise to important and life-changing pursuits, like health care, is a priority.

Connect with us and see what we can do for you.

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Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to lead, act with certainty and earn the lasting trust of their stakeholders. We develop powerful ideas and tell magnetic stories that move at the speed of news, make an immediate impact, transform culture and spark movements.

In the face of Covid-19, healthcare organizations are facing unprecedented new pressures globally and locally—the race for new treatments, diagnostics and a vaccine; upcoming U.S. elections and their impact on health policy and the regulatory environment; and a heightened focus on addressing health disparities and systemic inequalities. Yet these challenges also present an important moment for the health industry to contribute to solutions and to redefine its

reputation and purpose. The time to act is now.

At Edelman Health, we know how to advise our clients to best navigate the constantly changing nature of the healthcare landscape. We help healthcare brands and organizations build trust, enhance reputation and demonstrate leadership through action, moving mindsets and markets for the good of patients, healthcare and society at large. For more information, visit [www.edelman.com](http://www.edelman.com).

## EVOKE KYNE

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Evoke KYNE is an award-winning communications agency that harnesses insight, experience and creativity to advance health and wellbeing around the world. We are part of Evoke—a leading marketing, media and communications agency bound by a common purpose: Health More Human™. Our heritage is in two strong firms, KYNE and Evoke PR & Influence, which joined forces in 2019 to become one of the world's largest health communications agencies. We work with leading biotech and pharmaceutical companies, non-profits and foundations, offering full-service communications with core capabilities in corporate reputation and responsibility, global public health, brand and data communications, partnerships and stakeholder engagement, disease awareness and patient advocacy. We have global reach with offices in New York City, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Dublin and London, and key team members and/or senior consultants in Canada, France, Mozambique and Uganda. Our team lives by the belief that communication can be a powerful health intervention.

## FINN PARTNERS

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Finn Partners champions health innovation, helping clients navigate payer, provider, patient advocacy, health policy and product innovation ecosystems. Since our founding, a decade ago, FINN has grown steadily. With more than \$120 million in fees, and more than 800 collaborative team members working from 20 offices across three continents, we're now one of the world's largest agencies.

Named "Healthcare Agency of the Year" by PRovoke and health-sector trade group HITMC, FINN demonstrates extraordinary service and value through product communications, thought-leadership, investor relations, issues

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## FINN PARTNERS

Continued from page 57

management, key opinion leader engagement, clinical-trial recruitment and traditional and digital media support. Our more than 150 health clients include innovators and game-changers from across the health industry, including several top-20 pharmaceutical companies, some of the nation's largest hospitals and payer systems, and many of the world's boldest companies in artificial intelligence, health/technology, and medical devices. From medical innovations to breakthrough health/tech to services that improve care, our clients are united in their focus on the most important part of the health system: the patient.

Across the health ecosystem, FINN is best known for its work in changing the lives of people with pressing health challenges. Whether we are introducing new medicines and technologies that improve and extend life, uniting patient communities by way of digital platforms, or raising awareness of illnesses and how they can be better managed, FINN engages with our client partners on the products and ideas that have the power to transform people's lives.

## FLEISHMAN HILLARD

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**Anne de Schweinitz**, Global Managing Director, Healthcare

FleishmanHillard is known for never settling—for our clients and ourselves. Our 300+ healthcare specialists work alongside experts in reputation, brand marketing, earned and paid media, digital and social, public affairs, issues and crisis, and change communications, forming seamless teams that deliver the powerful insights, diverse communications counsel and bold strategies that today's healthcare organizations need to succeed.

Our experience is deep and broad across therapeutic categories and the full care continuum, from public education and prevention to acute care and chronic disease management, supporting our clients to educate, influence and drive action with health professionals,



**Soccer icon Leo Messi has become the global Ambassador for Finn Partners' client OrCam Technologies—a leader in personal, AI-driven assistive technology innovations—to raise awareness of the challenges faced by people who are blind or visually impaired, and of OrCam's assistive technology solutions, including OrCam MyEye, named among the TIME Best Inventions of 2019.**

patients and consumers, health systems, payers, and policymakers at home and around the world. Our team is stacked with scientific, regulatory and behavioral change experts, including PhDs and credentialed health professionals, who form the technical backbone of our global healthcare practice.

We put creativity, intelligence and strategy at the heart of solving our clients' challenges and we maintain a focus on DE&I to bring unique perspectives and innovation to the work we deliver. With 80 offices worldwide, we're a seamless global team dedicated to truth and authenticity, driven by insights and bold ideas, and committed to doing what's right.

Please contact Anne de Schweinitz, Global Managing Director, Healthcare: anne.deschweinitz@fleishman.com.

## FTI CONSULTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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**Mark McCall**, Global Segment Leader

As a leading global communications consultancy with more than 30 years of experience advising management teams and boards of directors, FTI Strategic Communications has an extensive track record of helping clients engage with their key stakeholders in order to protect their freedom to operate

and advance their business interests.

Our communications professionals provide an unparalleled combination of deep sector expertise, local market knowledge, and broad capabilities. We approach each situation with a focus on foundational message development along with disciplined and nimble scenario-based planning that draws on our prior experience, but is unique to the situation at hand, to anticipate various contingencies and potential outcomes, while ensuring coordinated and consistent communications.

The FTI Healthcare & Life Sciences team integrates experience in corporate communications with deep knowledge of investor rela-



**G&S Business Communications healthcare practice leader and SVP Rachael Adler.**

tions, capital markets, public affairs and government relations to enhance and safeguard our clients' reputations. We take a holistic and global view of clients' communications needs and develop unique solutions that help them effectively engage stakeholders and achieve business objectives in a complex and dynamic environment.

## G&S BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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G&S Business Communications is an integrated agency headquartered in New York, with offices in Chicago, Raleigh and Zürich/Basel, Switzerland. We are a team of researchers, media strategists, storytellers and engagement experts who meet our clients at the intersection of business and communications.

Our purpose is to help innovative companies change the world. We live and breathe our mission to inspire people to take action, resulting in business growth for our clients.

In our healthcare and wellness practice, it's the richly integrated kaleidoscope of care—physicians and patients, hospitals and health systems, providers and payers—that drives our passion for the industry. With over 30 years of healthcare expertise spanning everything from consumer healthcare, patient education and hospital systems to provider and payer communications, medtech, pharmaceutical processing and nutraceuticals, we help our clients keep up with the rapid pace of disruption, while clearing pathways for their message and their mission.

## GCI HEALTH

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**Wendy Lund**, CEO

GCI Health is an award-winning global integrated healthcare communications agency Inspired by People. We share our clients' desire



to improve the health of all people around the world and work tirelessly to contribute to their ambitious goals. Our approach to communications is rooted in looking at all stakeholders—patients, caregivers, healthcare providers, policymakers, reporters and payers—as people with distinct perspectives that shape how they think about health. We create breakthrough, people-driven programs that drive tangible results for our clients and the people they serve. And we carefully curate a culture that is catalyzed by the belief that people should be as successful in their personal lives as they are in their professional ones. Follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

## GREENOUGH BRAND STORYTELLERS

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**Phil Greenough**, Founder and CEO  
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Greenough Brand Storytellers builds storytelling platforms for clients across health care, from hospitals and health systems to companies that are disrupting medicine with new health information technology (HIT), medical devices, diagnostics and therapeutics. Our unique brand journalism approach is predicated on in-depth and constant interaction with health system leaders, physicians, technology experts, regulators, policy makers and, of course, patients.

Whether our client is a hospital looking to establish a new specialty, an HIT provider addressing medication adherence or a medical robotics company building brand

awareness among consumers, we focus on authentic, highly relatable stories that move audiences. We also know that context makes stories more powerful, and we've made it our business to track the evolving stories shaping healthcare today, from policy-making inside Washington to how those policies impact patients across rural America. Each day, we strategically deliver these stories to audiences and influencers across earned, owned and paid media.

## HAGER SHARP

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**Jennifer Wayman**, MHS, President & CEO

At Hager Sharp, we have dedicated almost 50 years to creating strategic communications and social marketing initiatives for organizations that are committed to fighting for equity in education, improving the health of people and communities, and empowering vulnerable populations. We are a full-service, integrated marketing and communications firm with deep expertise in public health, disease prevention, health promotion, and behavior change strategies. As an employee-owned small business, we have provided communications leadership across a wide range of health issues, including chronic and infectious diseases, cancer, vaccine promotion, genetic diseases, environmental health, women's health, food safety and nutrition, and substance abuse prevention. Hager Sharp's strategists, researchers, creative specialists, media experts, and public health professionals bring award-winning, research-driven, behavior-changing health communications services and social marketing campaigns to life. Our focus is, and always will be, working with mission-driven institutions, businesses, foundations, and nonprofits to create and execute ideas that make a difference.

## HUNTER

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**Samara Farber Mormar**, Executive VP, Business Development

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

Today's health brands have to find bold, breakthrough ways to earn consumer attention. HUNTER: Health + Beauty goes beyond "the pill" to help leading companies and brands show up authentically in the moments that matter for the consumers who matter most to their business. Our practice identifies unique insights to spark creative health campaigns that garner stand-alone media headlines for our brands and seamlessly integrate into consumer lifestyles, earning their attention and loyalty, while helping them look and feel great from the inside out. To do so, HUNTER employs a powerful blend of marketing solutions including strategic planning, social and digital media, talent and influencer engagement, media relations, experiential, multicultural, and content creation and distribution for all platforms and channels.

In partnership with some of the world's most respected consumer health companies and retailers including Johnson & Johnson, Church & Dwight, and The Vitamin Shoppe, HUNTER's work

has covered the medicine cabinet from oral care, allergy, sanitary protection, pain and pregnancy, to digestive health, vitamins, supplements, weight-loss and heart health.

## ICR

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Westwicke/ICR has established itself as one of the leading providers of integrated Public Relations and Investor Relations services for healthcare companies. Westwicke/ICR's healthcare practice works with more than 130 clients across life sciences, medical device/diagnostics, services and healthcare IT. With complementary services in digital branding, capital markets advisory, IPO advisory, crisis communication and corporate governance advisory, Westwicke/ICR offers a full suite of strategic communications and advisory services for startups and mature public companies alike. Whether the emphasis is on corporate, scientific and marketing communications, patient education and advocacy, preparing for an IPO or raising additional capital, we understand that every client is different, and so too, is their story. With an innate understanding of the many complex dynamics and influencers within the

— Continued on page 60



Knowing that comfort comes from education, HUNTER is rolling out a multi-layered communications plan that shows and tells parents how to use Tytocare, a new at-home telehealth device, in the places where they are seeking information about health for their family. HUNTER is working with mom-centric digital publishing partners and social influencers to create dynamic storytelling content that brings the experience to life. Through a robust paid campaign on Google properties and social platforms, we are showing up in their social feeds to educate about the convenience of the product and retargeting parents with an incentive to purchase. And, adding credibility to the brand through trusted doctors and third-party advocates in earned media.



## ICR

Continued from page 59

healthcare ecosystem and a clear lens on the financial impact of all communications, Westwicke/ICR takes a hands-on approach to understand both the science and the sentiment behind your business, ensuring that your message goes beyond simple clarity to resonate and make a lasting impression with the audiences that matter most.

## IMRE HEALTH

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**Dave Imre**, Partner & CEO  
**Mark Eber**, Partner & President  
**Crystalyn Stuart**, Partner & President, Innovators  
**Jeff Smokler**, Partner & President, Imre Health

At imre Health, we believe that taking a moment to listen can change everything. And championing empathy and compassion on a global scale for patients and physicians—and our clients—can be a game changer.

By emphasizing these values alongside services that span creative, brand strategy & insights, medical & scientific affairs, and activation strategy (social media, digital marketing and earned communications), our 165+ employees are able to deliver imaginative orchestrated ideas for the pharmaceutical and biotech brands of tomorrow.

imre Health is a fiercely independent, LGBTQ-owned agency working with many of the world's leading life science brands across AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Bausch Health, Sobi, BioCryst and EQRx, among others. To learn more, please visit: www.imre.com/health.

## JARRARD PHILLIPS CATE & HANCOCK

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Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock, Inc. is a top-10 strategic communications consulting firm devoted to helping the nation's health systems and health services companies nav-



**imre Health Partner and President, Jeff Smokler.**

igate confidently through change, challenge and opportunity. With offices in Nashville and Chicago, Jarrard Inc. has guided leaders at more than 500 healthcare organizations across the country through high-stakes moments, including leading communications and political strategy for more than \$60 billion in announced M&A. Our team of former journalists, political operatives and healthcare executives works alongside every client to build a custom strategy that delivers measurable results in the areas of M&A, issues and crisis management, strategic positioning opportunities and systemic change management. For more information, visit jarrardinc.com or follow us @JarrardInc.

## JPA HEALTH

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JPA Health is an independent agency offering integrated PR, marketing and advocacy services. Our exclusive focus on health means that our life science, med-tech and nonprofit clients can count on a team with experience and perspective to deliver results. Our approach incorporates a proprietary tool that enables us to understand how conversations take place within the health sector. JPA's Gretel® brings together news media, orga-

nizations and individual influencers to show precisely how they intersect, revealing insights for reaching and engaging audiences. Importantly, at JPA, we share our clients' commitment to improving and protecting lives. This ideology inspires our work. We invite you to learn more by contacting one of our offices: Washington, DC; Boston; and London.

## LANDIS COMMUNICATIONS

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At LCI, "We believe in ideas that create change. We craft compelling stories. And, we communicate." Named America's #1 Healthcare PR Agency (Ragan's Ace Awards) and annually listed on *O'Dwyer's* list of top Bay Area agencies, San Francisco-based Landis Communications Inc. (LCI) is celebrating 30 years in business. This year, LCI won PRSA SF's "Agency of the Year" and "Campaign of the Year" awards. We've also won the IABC Gold Quill award, a national PRSA Silver Anvil award, numerous Bulldog Awards and have been named the #1 social media agency in the U.S. by TopPRagencies.com. LGBT-owned and a certified member of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, LCI is a full-service public relations, digital marketing, social media and marketing communications agency. Our PR specialties include: healthcare, technology, consumer,

environmental, consumer technology, retail, real estate, hospitality, design, B2C and B2B programs. LCI's Promised Results® return-on-investment program provides tangible metrics addressing clients' identified goals. Healthcare clients include: Altas (healthcare for physicians, patients and the clinical community), Sutter Health, Frontier Medicines (biopharma), On Lok Senior Health Services, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford, University of California at San Francisco, PRC, Global Alzheimer's Platform Foundation, Brain Health Registry, Merck, Johnson & Johnson, Planned Parenthood, Crestwood Behavioral Health and more. David Landis is a founding member of the Forbes San Francisco Business Council and the San Francisco Business Times Leadership Trust. LCI also is the San Francisco member of the Public Relations Global Network, with 50 affiliate agencies worldwide. For information: www.landispr.com.

## LAVOIEHEALTH- SCIENCE

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**Ella Deych Cerminara**, VP, Finance & Chief Operations Officer  
**Paul Sagan**, VP, Investor Relations



**LCI receiving its award this year from PRSA San Francisco as the best small agency of the year in the San Francisco Bay Area.**

& Corporate Communications  
**Lisa DeScenza**, VP, Integrated Communications  
**Harriet Ullman**, AVP, PR and Product Communications  
**Deanna Meservey**, AVP, Communications, PR & Media

LaVoieHealthScience (LHS) is a leading strategic, integrated communications firm that partners exclusively with health and science brands to build value for their companies, attract capital and reach key stakeholders. We provide public relations, investor relations, marketing, and strategy consulting to our clients to shape their messaging and make their technologies, products and services known, understandable and approachable. After nearly two decades in business, LHS has served more than 375 clients across a wide range of therapeutic areas including oncology, gene therapy, ophthalmology, and neurodegenerative disease. The agency has received over 50 awards in recognition of its work for industry-leading clients. Honors received by LHS include being inducted in the 2018 *Inc.* 5000 Hall of Fame List of the Fastest Growing Private Companies, ranked on *PR Week's* list of 2019 Top Agencies and included in *PR News's* inaugural Agency Elite Top 100. In January 2020, LHS and Omnicom Public Relations Group (OPRG), a division of Omnicom Group (NYSE: OMC), formed a strategic alliance to bring clients a broader set of integrated health and science experienced teams globally. In June 2020, LHS formed another strategic alliance with Bioscience Valuation BSV GmbH, a company that provides evidence-based strategic valuation assessments to life-science companies.

## LOVELL COMMUNICATIONS INC.

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**Dana Coleman**, VP  
**Robin Embry**, VP  
**Susanne Powelson**, VP

**Who We Are:** Lovell Communications protects health care brand reputations and supports providers and the companies that serve them



**Lovell Communications' strategic public relations work has received hundreds of national, regional and local awards over the past three decades.**

with award-winning communication strategy and stakeholder engagement.

**Expertise:** For more than 30 years, Lovell Communications has served as strategic counsel and trusted partner to health care providers and suppliers across the country.

Publicly traded companies, not-for-profit systems, early-stage and mature companies draw upon our vast communications expertise to support them through phases—or just moments—when it's crucial to persuade audiences or influence decision makers.

We help organizations optimize opportunities, manage challenges and navigate changes and crises of all size. Our in-depth, results-oriented communications strategies focus on business-to-business marketing, consumer engagement, internal communication programs and stakeholder persuasion campaigns.

- We specialize in:
- Transaction Support
  - Crisis Communications
  - Thought Leadership
  - Internal and External Communications

Our firm—and the talented individuals who make it remarkable—has been recognized with hundreds

of national, regional and local awards.

## MARKETING MAVEN

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**Lindsey Carnett**, CEO & President

With offices in Los Angeles and New York City, Marketing Maven's combination of PR, social media, influencer marketing and market research helps provide a competitive edge to their clients. Marketing Maven helps businesses grow their revenues by developing campaigns that engage a target audience, generate sales then utilize advanced metrics to measure ROI.

Named to the 2018 and 2017 *Inc.* 5000 List of Fastest Growing Companies in America and *Entrepreneur* magazine's 2016 Entrepreneur 360 List as one of the Most Entrepreneurial Companies in America, their services aid na-

tional marketing campaigns and product launches with reputation management, organic SEO tracking, competitive analysis reports and online product reviews to help increase revenue.

Marketing Maven is a federally recognized Native American Owned 8(a) and WOSB certified company. They are also a certified Small Business (SB) with the California Department of General Services (DGS) and a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) with the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

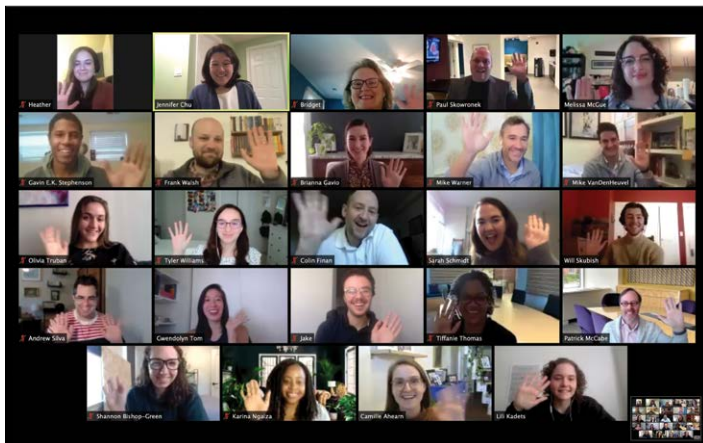
Specialties include: Multicultural, beauty/fashion, professional services, travel/hospitality, home furnishings, financial PR/investor relations, healthcare, food & beverage, entertainment/sports, technology, environmental/public affairs clients and social media.

## MCCABE MESSAGE PARTNERS

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**Rachel Griffith**, Vice President

Like a stone meeting water, effective communications ripple out to reach and motivate many audiences. McCabe Message Partners helps clients create their own ripple effect. Focusing solely on health and issues that affect it, team members bring experience in journalism, market research, public policy, consumer advocacy, corporate communications, and non-profit management. Clients include a who's who of national and regional health philanthropies, government agencies, academic institutions, clinician organizations, industry associations, patient organizations, and corporations. Company culture—one of mutual respect, inclusion, fairness, and equality—is the result of ongoing engagement and active participation by every member of the team. McCabe Message Partners offers the expertise and professionalism of a large agency with the warmth and passion of a small business that believes deeply in improving health and well-being.



**A virtual McCabe Message partners staff meeting.**



## MCS HEALTHCARE PUBLIC RELATIONS

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**Laura de Zutter, VP**

For more than three decades, MCS has remained a constant fixture in an ever-changing media marketplace by adapting and innovating as rapidly as the science itself. As an independent specialty shop solely focused on healthcare, we think of ourselves as a swift boat among battleships: small but sturdy; nimble and reliable; and best-suited for operations that are difficult, demanding and unique.

Together, we turn strategy and creativity to action, resulting in solutions that specifically, comprehensively and robustly address your current needs.

We are experts in all facets of communications, including digital; social media; and paid, owned and earned channels. As your partners, we will bring new integrated ideas and real solutions to the table, and feel empowered to raise our hand when we have an idea on how to improve your business.

We take measurement seriously. We evaluate impact and proactively answer the questions, “so what?” and “what now?”

We are a highly collaborative bunch that believes in the pollination of ideas across all brand communications. We welcome the opportunity to partner with your creative agencies, co-marketers and cross-functional colleagues to deliver results more efficiently and with a holistic vision of the brand’s success.

## MERRITT GROUP

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**Shahed Ahmed, SVP, Senior Partner**

From our roots focused on the most cutting-edge technologies,



**MP&F Strategic Communications and BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee accept the Public Relations Society of America’s Best of Silver Anvil award, the highest national honor a communications firm can win, for the Don’t Be an Accidental Drug Dealer public education campaign.**

Merritt Group is an award-winning, woman-owned healthcare marketing and PR agency that thrives at the intersection of deep domain expertise and full-service agency proficiency. We help our healthcare clients drive growth and meet the needs of today’s patients, providers, physicians, insurers and influencers across a complex healthcare continuum.

Our team deeply understands the transformative world of healthcare. With a more consumer-driven healthcare marketplace and constant changes to the healthcare policy landscape, Merritt Group can be your sentinel to navigate how to market to your core audiences.

For more than 15 years, we have worked with leading and emerging brands including GoHealth Urgent Care, Samsung Health, InnoCaption, Avizia, MedGenome and more.

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

## MERRYMAN COMMUNICATIONS

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**Ashley Cadle, Account Director**  
**Joni Ramirez, Account Director**

Merryman Communications works

closely with healthcare clients ranging from start-ups to *Fortune* 500 companies as a strategic partner in integrated marketing, communications, public relations and digital marketing. We are a full-service agency, and we offer a wide range of capabilities and special expertise to ensure we have all a client’s needs covered. The Merryman Communications team has worked across virtually all healthcare industry categories and therapeutic areas, including medical devices and diagnostics, biotech and pharmaceuticals, health IT, health plans, hospitals and physician groups/IPAs and nonprofits. We’re based in Los Angeles and have team members around the country. We’re all seasoned veterans of global advertising and PR agencies, so we offer “big agency” know-how but with a boutique, specialty agency touch. Our virtual model helps your budgets go further. We get results for our clients, our team as well as the agency so that we can be successful together.

## MP&F STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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MP&F Strategic Communications works with clients large and small from all over the country in a variety of industries, from health care to technology, to hospitality and education. We help our clients reach the right audiences with the right messages in order to create

change and motivate action. Media relations, marketing, digital strategy, data and analytics, influencer outreach, partnership building, advertising, and great design work are just a few of the tools we use daily. Find us online at [www.mpf.com](http://www.mpf.com) and @mpfcomm on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Clients include Acumen, ADS Security, Austin Peay State University, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Cox Automotive, CSX Transportation, FirstBank, Integral Senior Living, National Museum of African American Music, Nokian Tyres, PhRMA, Realtracs, Renaissance Hotel—Nashville, Republic Services, Solstice Senior Living, TVA, U.S. Department of Labor, Walmart and Western Governors University.

## PADILLA

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**Fred Lake, Senior Vice President/Health Lead**

Padilla is an independently operated, globally resourced public relations and communication company with offices across the United States. The agency builds, grows and protects brands and reputations worldwide by creating purposeful connections with the people who matter most through public relations, advertising, digital and social marketing, investor relations and brand strategy. Padilla includes the brand consultancy of Joe Smith, the food and nutrition experts at FoodMinds, and the research authorities at SMS Research Advisors.

Health clients include 3M, Be The Match, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Hackensack Meridian Health, Lupus Foundation of America, Mayo Clinic, Medtronic, Purdue, Sanofi, VBI Vaccines and others.

Padilla’s Health team consists of seasoned health and science strategists spanning the health care ecosystem, specializing in: pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies; device makers, vaccine manufacturers; hospital and health systems; insurers, payor groups; and nonprofits, government.

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

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## PAN COMMUNICATIONS

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**Gareth Thomas**, Managing Dir., UK

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

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## PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS INC.

Partner in The Worldcom Public Relations Group

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Team members at Public Communications Inc. are passionate about healthcare. We create communication solutions for national and international healthcare cli-

ents in every sector. Healthcare communications is at the core of our national, independent agency, which boasts nearly five decades of healthcare experience.

PCI consistently delivers award-winning programs and campaigns for clients ranging from advocacy organizations and medical and allied health associations to Fortune 100 corporations; healthcare technology innovators and device makers; biotech and hospital suppliers; hospitals and health systems; service providers; accrediting agencies; and consultants. PCI also knows healthcare audiences first-hand. We understand what makes them tick, how to reach them, and know the words that will resonate and prompt engagement.

Healthcare represents more than half of PCI's business. Our clients include more than 25 medical and dental associations, start-ups looking for visibility and university health systems. We launch products and manage lifecycle communications; run consumer awareness and screening programs on a turn-key basis; develop professional relations campaigns designed to draw referrals; and develop digital media strategies, campaigns and platforms including efficient on-line newsrooms and content-rich websites.

More than a third of our healthcare clients have stayed with us 10 years or more with some exceeding 20-year partnerships. Our success grows from truly listening to, and talking with, our clients. We then create solutions and deliver quality service and results that meet or exceed our clients' goals.

## RACEPOINT GLOBAL

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

We believe that the complex challenges we face as a global society can only be tackled by embracing creativity and innovation fueled by purpose. Every company in every



**The Reis Group strongly believes in nurturing the next generation of PR professionals. Before COVID, we gave in-person presentations like this one at American University in Washington, D.C. (left). During the pandemic, we continued our efforts in a Zoom format (right), with students from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.**

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.

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## THE REIS GROUP

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**Sharon Reis**, Principal  
**Tamara Moore, Lauren Musiol**, SVPs  
**Beth Casteel, Peter Pearl**, Sr. Counselors

Full-service communications for health, medical, science, and social issues.

The Reis Group is a small, woman-owned public relations agency specializing in health and social causes. Established in 2016, we were recently named Best New Agency of the Year by The Public Relations Society of America's National Capital Chapter. We are proud to work with a wide range

of clients who are committed to improving the health of our nation, including nonprofits, foundations, federal agencies, associations, health systems, corporations, and universities.

Our team of more than a dozen seasoned communications professionals has decades of experience working closely with clients as their communications partners, offering services including environmental scans, message testing, earned media outreach, thought leadership, video production, community engagement, issues management, content development, social and digital media, and website development and management.

Our goal is to provide every client with the skills and capabilities of a highly specialized agency, along with the commitment and dedication of a small business.

Partial client list includes: American Gastroenterological Association, Banner Alzheimer's Institute, Blue Shield of California Foundation, Digestive Disease Week, Nemours Children's Health System, National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America and Society of Interventional Radiology.

## REVIVEHEALTH

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ReviveHealth is a full-service agency focused on the intersection of healthcare delivery, finance, and innovation. Recently named 2020 Healthcare Agency of the Year (PProvoke Media), ReviveHealth

Continued on page 64



## REVIVE HEALTH

Continued from page 63

brings a depth of perspective and experience that's essential to navigating a complex and rapidly changing industry. With more than 100 marketing communication professionals across the country and a national client footprint of leading healthcare brands, ReviveHealth is built to help healthcare brands thrive. The agency's work and culture are perennially recognized by peers and industry leaders, most recently including Healthcare Agency of the Year and Best Agency to Work For (PRovoke Media) and Crisis Communications Agency of the Year (*Black Book*). ReviveHealth is a part of Constituency Management Group (CMG), a wholly-owned unit of the Interpublic Group (IPG). CMG comprises 29 specialty marketing firms with over 7,000 employees. Explore and follow ReviveHealth at [thinkrevivehealth.com](http://thinkrevivehealth.com) and on Twitter at @ThinkRevive.

Clients include: Bon Secours Mercy Health CareCentrix, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System, Henry Ford Health System, Landmark Health, Lumeris, Omnicell, Onduo, Penn State Health, Teladoc, The Christ Hospital, Trinity Health, UC Davis and VCU Health.

## THE SPI GROUP, LLC

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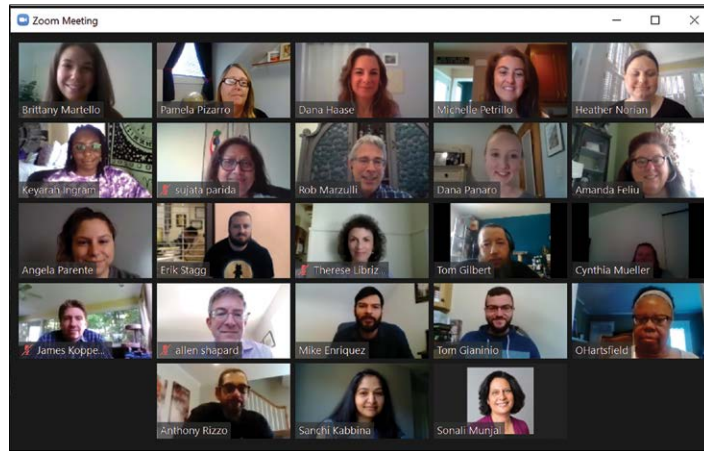
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**Ollie Hartsfield**, Managing Director—Communications Strategy and Editorial

**Sonali Munjal**, Managing Director—Application Development

**Allen Shapard**, Managing Director  
**Heather Norian**, Chief Operating Officer

SPI Group is an award-winning agency that uses digital solutions to amplify the employee experience. We do our best work where communications and innovative technologies meet. Whether creating award-winning intranets, integrating employee apps, or using



SPI Group agency staff meeting in 2020.

gamification to launch employee programs, for more than 20 years, we've been bringing smart communications solutions to enterprise clients.

Partnering with SPI Group means solving communications challenges through our integrated services—everything from strategy and design to editorial and web development. Our clients value our high-touch service, serving as an extension of their teams with flexibility, tactical know-how, and a strategic mindset. Visit our website to learn more about our full range of services, including: Employee Engagement, Digital Solutions, Leadership Communications, Storytelling, Creative Services, Writing and Editorial Management, and Assessment and Measurement.

## STANTON

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Stanton works with a wide variety of emerging and established organizations across the spectrum of healthcare, from providers and management organizations to services and insurance, senior care, treatments, and technologies. This is why growing healthcare organizations turn to Stanton. We excel at helping healthcare innovators grow their businesses by raising company profiles, building reputations

and capturing mindshare.

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.

## TREVELINO/KELLER

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Ranked #1 in Healthcare in Atlanta, Trevelino/Keller continues to see its healthcare practice outperform all practices. Its long-standing base of experience with the CDC and United Healthcare, coupled with one of the country's deepest technology practices and Atlanta's leading lifestyle practice, has advanced its healthcare work across Health IT, retail health and healthcare. Having a base of experience with Ebola, Zika and other health crises, the firm has been sought after in the broader healthcare/wellness market as companies strategize over their place in the B2C and B2B landscape.

Some highlights of recent engagements include groundbreaking work in the cancer treatment segment with SpecCare, a first mover in Live Tissue Science™, 360 reputation marketing for SOC Telemed, as well as the Q4 launch of Mossa's Movement Health initiative to address both the sedentary market and health club crisis through virtual, accessible programming. Independent of its client work, the agency was a founding partner in GeorgiaALIVE, a public awareness, education and support organization in response to COVID-19.

While the firm's public relations discipline continues to grow, it's seeing greater demand for its 360 reputation marketing approach which leverages its integrated marketing group as well as its creative arm, Groovy Studios. Its suite of services includes public relations, integrated marketing, demand generation and creative services.

Unrelated to healthcare, but an important new initiative for the firm was the recent launch of Voice4Change Project, the firm's ongoing anti-racism platform acknowledging racism in America and encouraging education and action. Owning the industry's number one retention rate, having lost two staffers to an agency in 17 years, the firm is known for its progressive, culture-rich programs like Red with Ted, Cooleaf Pro, Read to Lead, Farm to T/K, GeorgiaALIVE and Voice4Change Project. For more information, visit [trevelinokeller.com](http://trevelinokeller.com).

## W2O

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Founded by Jim Weiss in 2001 and built on an ethos of entrepreneurship, staying fluid and doing the right thing, W2O has achieved 18 years of uninterrupted growth while remaining fiercely independent. W2O is an alchemic mix of 1,400 people and hundreds of clients and partners—working from bench to bedside—to make the world a healthier place.

Driven by data, W2O applies proprietary analytics and best-in-class technology to build insights that power creative ideas and concepts. W2O seeks to become the partner of choice to empower optimal healthcare knowledge, access and outcomes—now and in the future. ○

# O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

## TOP HEALTHCARE & MEDICAL PR FIRMS

| Firm   | Net Fees (2019) | Firm  | Net Fees (2019) |
|--|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. <b>W2O Group</b> , San Francisco, CA                        | \$218,883,000   | 35. <b>Shift Communications</b> , Boston, MA                      | \$1,472,202     |
| 2. <b>Edelman</b> , New York, NY                               | 154,744,000     | 36. <b>Trevelino/Keller</b> , Atlanta, GA                         | 1,450,000       |
| 3. <b>Spectrum</b> , Washington, DC                            | 33,900,000      | 37. <b>Racepoint Global</b> , Boston, MA                          | 1,249,665       |
| 4. <b>APCO Worldwide</b> , Washington, DC                      | 31,556,300      | 38. <b>G&amp;S Business Communications</b> , New York, NY         | 1,235,239       |
| 5. <b>Finn Partners</b> , New York, NY                         | 31,010,000      | 39. <b>Tunheim</b> , Minneapolis, MN                              | 1,178,004       |
| 6. <b>Evoke KYNE</b> , New York, NY                            | 25,149,453      | 40. <b>Inkhouse</b> , Waltham, MA                                 | 995,984         |
| 7. <b>Crosby</b> , Annapolis, MD                               | 23,420,131      | 41. <b>L.C. Williams &amp; Associates</b> , Chicago, IL           | 932,222         |
| 8. <b>IMRE, LLC</b> , Baltimore, MD                            | 20,995,000      | 42. <b>Agency Ten22</b> , Cumming, GA                             | 803,475         |
| 9. <b>ICR</b> , New York, NY                                   | 18,873,911      | 43. <b>Raffetto Herman Strategic Communications</b> , Seattle, WA | 665,954         |
| 10. <b>M Booth Health</b> , New York, NY                       | 16,582,440      | 44. <b>FrazierHeiby</b> , Columbus, OH                            | 631,016         |
| 11. <b>Jarrard Phillips Cate &amp; Hancock</b> , Brentwood, TN | 12,416,807      | 45. <b>Landis Communications</b> , San Francisco, CA              | 601,000         |
| 12. <b>JPA Health Communications</b> , Washington, DC          | 10,305,362      | 46. <b>Pierpont Communications</b> , Houston, TX                  | 593,655         |
| 13. <b>Coyne PR</b> , Parsippany, NJ                           | 9,800,000       | 47. <b>Jackson Spalding</b> , Atlanta, GA                         | 590,182         |
| 14. <b>Zeno Group</b> , New York, NY                           | 9,746,452       | 48. <b>Buchanan Public Relations</b> , Bryn Mawr, PA              | 565,643         |
| 15. <b>Padilla</b> , Minneapolis, MN                           | 8,454,957       | 49. <b>Singer Associates, Inc.</b> , San Francisco, CA            | 511,025         |
| 16. <b>Sam Brown Inc.</b> , Wayne, PA                          | 6,341,947       | 50. <b>Standing Partnership</b> , St. Louis, MO                   | 507,455         |
| 17. <b>McCabe Message Partners</b> , Washington, DC            | 5,789,127       | 51. <b>French   West   Vaughan</b> , Raleigh, NC                  | 382,105         |
| 18. <b>Matter Communications</b> , Newburyport, MA             | 4,859,956       | 52. <b>LaunchSquad</b> , San Francisco, CA                        | 377,000         |
| 19. <b>SPI Group LLC, The</b> , Fairfield, NJ                  | 4,700,000       | 53. <b>Rosica Communications</b> , Fair Lawn, NJ                  | 344,950         |
| 20. <b>5W Public Relations</b> , New York, NY                  | 4,600,000       | 54. <b>Greentarget Global LLC</b> , Chicago, IL                   | 320,000         |
| 21. <b>MCS Healthcare Public Relations</b> , Bedminster, NJ    | 4,372,952       | 55. <b>Peppercomm</b> , New York, NY                              | 284,061         |
| 22. <b>Bliss Integrated Communication</b> , New York, NY       | 3,511,000       | 56. <b>Perry Communications Group, Inc.</b> , Sacramento, CA      | 273,675         |
| 23. <b>Moore, Inc.</b> , Tallahassee, FL                       | 3,389,675       | 57. <b>Serendipit</b> , Phoenix, AZ                               | 206,011         |
| 24. <b>LaVoie Health Science</b> , Boston, MA                  | 3,270,282       | 58. <b>Fish Consulting</b> , Fort Lauderdale, FL                  | 193,000         |
| 25. <b>PAN Communications</b> , Boston, MA                     | 3,149,102       | 59. <b>Hoyt Organization Inc., The</b> , Torrance, CA             | 155,000         |
| 26. <b>MWWPR</b> , New York, NY                                | 3,145,208       | 60. <b>Brownstein Group</b> , Philadelphia, PA                    | 154,768         |
| 27. <b>Kivvit</b> , Chicago, IL                                | 3,024,369       | 61. <b>Judge Public Relations, LLC</b> , Tampa, FL                | 152,772         |
| 28. <b>Lovell Communications</b> , Nashville, TN               | 2,952,973       | 62. <b>WordWrite Communications LLC</b> , Pittsburgh, PA          | 135,000         |
| 29. <b>Hunter</b> , New York, NY                               | 2,950,000       | 63. <b>Approach Marketing</b> , Worthington, OH                   | 134,943         |
| 30. <b>MP&amp;F Strategic Communications</b> , Nashville, TN   | 2,816,689       | 64. <b>TruePoint Communications</b> , Dallas, TX                  | 111,540         |
| 31. <b>Public Communications Inc.</b> , Chicago, IL            | 2,656,882       | 65. <b>Marketing Maven Public Relations</b> , Camarillo, CA       | 109,496         |
| 32. <b>Beehive Strategic Communication</b> , St. Paul, MN      | 2,319,782       | 66. <b>IW Group, Inc.</b> , West Hollywood, CA                    | 106,000         |
| 33. <b>rbb Communications</b> , Miami, FL                      | 2,260,799       | 67. <b>Bradford Group, The</b> , Nashville, TN                    | 61,584          |
| 34. <b>Havas Formula</b> , New York, NY                        | 1,560,052       | 68. <b>Lawlor Media Group</b> , New York, NY                      | 33,000          |



# Two big 'ifs' could pave way for Trump reelection

By Fraser Seitel

**T**he single most astonishing “revelation” of Bob Woodward’s published “Rage” against Donald Trump is that nobody much cared.



**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*.

After three-and-a-half years as President, most Americans aren’t at all surprised to learn that Trump: lies; bullies; is a narcissist; cares, above all else, about the welfare of himself and his family; refuses to listen to anyone else; is often infernally stupid, as exemplified by choosing to talk to a duplicitous snake like Woodward in

the first place. (Despite his after-the-fact protestations, Woodward’s calculated decision to withhold, until book publication, Trump’s true beliefs about the dangers of COVID are all you need to know about the author’s own “moral compass.”)

So, while journalists breathlessly hailed the latest Woodward hatchet job as a “bombshell,” most Americans received it as just another ho hum example of “Trump being Trump.”

The fact is that a bit more than half of all Americans despise Trump and a bit less than half accept him; no matter what Bob Woodward or anyone else tells them. Any attempt to change the minds of these polarized opposites is futile.

Which brings us to the November election and the incumbent’s uphill, last-ditch climb to erase the sticky seven-point poll lead that Joe Biden has hung onto for months. Trump’s only chance to win is convincing swing voters in five states—Michigan, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Florida—that his unique brand of administrative lunacy deserves another four years.

With a little more than a month to go, it’s unlikely that Trump can pull it off. But it’s not impossible.

For one thing, Trump’s opponent is a pitifully weak candidate, whose advisers—like Trump’s—get apoplectic every time he ventures off script.

Biden, at 77, has lost more than a step. His

factual recall is limited. He tends to speak in vague generalities and gets confused with specifics. And his obvious antipathy to his opponent is so severe—and so sincere—that the frequently flappable Biden may “flap” even more—to his detriment—if goaded by Trump.

So, even though Trump himself isn’t terribly articulate or knowledgeable and is also prone to fly off the handle at the slightest slight, his best chance to run roughshod over his feeble challenger may lie in the three scheduled debates over the next three weeks.

Biden will be particularly challenged in the first debate, moderated by Fox News’ Chris Wallace, who will pepper the former Vice President on all matter of embarrassing questions: from his alleged use of a teleprompter during interviews to his son’s unchallenged windfall for a do-nothing job in Ukraine. Trump, on the other hand, just conducted a White House interview with Wallace, so he’s more experienced in handling the Fox reporter’s take-no-prisoners persistence.

Trump’s greatest debate challenge will be the last of the three, moderated by Kristen Welker of NBC, who has proudly carried her network’s anti-Trump banner as White House correspondent for the past several years. Trump will likely use the debate forum to spar with Welker and challenge her motives, as he has done regularly at White House COVID briefings.

And this technique—of challenging a hostile media—may provide an additional route to help the incumbent eke out another improbable victory.

First, the nation’s trust in the media has steadily eroded during the Trump presidency. According to the 2020 Knight Foundation-Gallup survey, a whopping 86 percent of Americans detect either “a great deal” or a “fair amount” of political bias in news coverage.

Second, as the presidential campaign has worn on, an increasing number of once-respected media outlets—particularly CNN and the *New York Times*—have surrendered any pretense of “objectivity” as far as Trump is concerned.

The *Times*’ rotating cadre of daily anti-Trump beat reporters regularly quotes anonymous “presidential advisers” who bemoan their candidate’s dimming prospects. Meanwhile, Biden is hailed for delivering “high energy performances” defined by “withering criticism of Mr. Trump and palpable enthusiasm for connecting with

voters.”

Meanwhile, CNN convenes daily panels of its homegrown stable of dour Trump haters—Jim Acosta, Gloria Borger, Jake Tapper, et al—to pick over, ad nauseum, the President’s personal problems and lack of qualifications to remain in office.

So, third, if the Knight-Gallup findings are to be believed, and 80 percent of Americans perceive inaccurate news to be “intentional,” then it’s entirely likely that swing voters in these crucial swing states may resent that outlets like the *Times* and CNN so blatantly bias their coverage to defeat Trump. And it’s certainly possible, therefore, that these key voters will express their displeasure by casting their ballots for Trump.

Again, with the clock winding down, the smart money is still on Biden to end America’s most chaotic Presidency; especially with the potential prospect of a fall coronavirus resurgence and an incumbent so eminently capable of saying or tweeting something stupid in the final days to ensure disaster.

Nonetheless, because Biden is so fundamentally weak, the election promises to be close. And if Trump can trip up the challenger in the debates, and if swing state fence sitters find an increasingly-biased media intolerable—admittedly, two big “ifs”—then don’t count out another Donald Trump election surprise in November. ●

## PR news brief

### Sloane & Co. rises to defense of Cubic

Sloane & Co. represents Cubic Corp. as the San Diego-based defense and transportation (fare collection/revenue management) systems company adopts a poison pill defense in the wake of a potential takeover bid by hedge fund Elliott Management and Veritas Capital.

Reuters reported that Cubic has held private talks with its possible suitors for a number of weeks.

Cubic says it issued a rights plan after Elliott disclosed that it has accumulated a 15 percent ownership stake. David Melcher, lead independent director at Cubic, said the company is committing to creating long-term value and ensuring that investors realize the full potential of their investment.

The rights plan “is intended to provide the board with time to make informed decisions and prevent any third party from obtaining control of Cubic in a manner and at a price that are not in the best interests of Cubic’s shareholders,” he said.

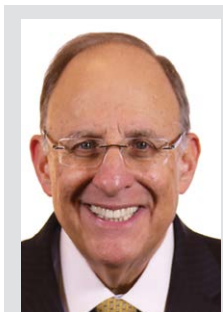
Sloane & Co.’s Dan Zacchei and Joe Germani handle Cubic, which lost \$60.7 million on \$1 billion in revenues during the nine-month ended June period.

Stagwell Group’s SKDKnickerbocker is the parent company of Sloane & Co.

# Business loss changes from the CARES Act

By Richard Goldstein

**T**he public relations industry is facing unprecedented challenges in light of COVID-19. The purpose of this month's column is to provide agency owners with information that may be helpful.



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

The Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act made changes to excess business losses. Some of the changes are retroactive and there may be opportunities for some PR agencies to file amended returns. The following are some of the changes that may impact your agency.

## Deferral of excess business loss limits

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act provided that net tax losses from active businesses in excess of an inflation adjusted \$500,000 for joint filers—or an inflation adjusted \$250,000 for other covered taxpayers—are to be treated as Net Operating Loss carryforwards in the following tax year. The covered taxpayers are individuals, estates and trusts that own businesses directly or as partnerships or shareholders in an S corporation.

The \$500,000 and \$250,000 limits, which are adjusted for inflation for the tax years beginning after calendar year 2018, were scheduled under the TCJA to apply to tax years beginning in calendar year 2018 to 2025. The CARES Act has retroactively postponed the limits so that they now apply to tax years beginning in calendar years 2021 to 2025.

The postponement means that you may be able to amend:

- Any filed 2018 tax returns that reflected a disallowed excess business loss (to allow the loss in 2018) and;
- Any filed 2019 tax return that reflected a disallowed 2019 loss and/or carryover of a disallowed 2018 loss (to allow the 2019 loss and/or eliminate the carryover).

The excess business loss limits also don't apply to tax years that began in 2020. Thus, the 2020 year can be a window to start a business with large up-front-deductible items (for example, capital items that can be 100 percent deducted with large up-

front-deductible items or other provisions) and be used to offset the resulting net losses from business against investment income or income from employment.

## Changes to excess business loss limits

The CARES Act made several retroactive corrections to the excess business loss rules as they were originally stated in the 2017 TCJA.

Most importantly, the CARES Act clarified that deductions, gross income or gain attributable to employment aren't considered in calculating an excess business loss. Meaning, excess business losses can't shelter either net taxable investment income or net taxable employment income. If you are planning a start-up that will begin to generate—or will still be generating—excess business losses in 2021, be mindful of that.

Another change provides that an excess business loss doesn't include any deduction under the tax code provisions involving the NOL deduction or the qualified business income deduction that effectively reduces income taxes on many businesses.

Because capital losses of non-corporations can't offset ordinary income under the NOL rules:

- Capital loss deductions are not considered in computing the excess business loss and;
- The amount of capital gain considered in computing the loss can't exceed the lesser of capital gain net income from a trade or business or capital gain net income. 19

## What you need to know about payroll tax deferral

The IRS released guidance on the payroll tax deferral from the Presidential Memorandum issued on August 8, 2020, which allows employers to defer withholding and payments of an employee's portion of the Social Security tax if that employee's wages are below a certain amount.

Under the guidance, the Social Security tax deferral may apply only to employees with a pretax wage or compensation that are less than \$4,000 during a biweekly pay period for wages paid from September 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020, with each pay period considered separately.

Employers can defer the employee portion of the Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance tax under Sec. 3101(a) and Railroad Retirement Act Tier 1 tax under Sec. 3201. The due dates for withholding, and payment of these taxes is postponed until Jan. 1, 2021 and ends April 30, 2021. Interest, penalties and additions to tax will begin to accrue on unpaid taxes starting May 1, 2021.

There are unknowns, such as what an employer should do when employees quit before the end of the year or how this applies to self-employed individuals. Frankly, I don't know of any business in our practice that has expressed interest in this. Nevertheless, because it has received a fair amount of press, I thought I would mention it. ○

# COVID-19 upends agencies' business models

By Jon Gingerich

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy financial toll on companies and has dramatically altered the operations and business models of those that remain.

A survey of executives by Chicago-based digital marketing shop Digital Third Coast shows that marketing and advertising agencies haven't been exempt from this phenomenon.

DTC's survey, which asked executives about their agency's experience since the start of the pandemic and how their business has been impacted as a result, found that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of agencies polled were forced to make financial changes because of COVID-19.

Additionally, more than two-thirds (68 percent) said COVID-19 has altered how

their company operates as well.

Three-quarters (75 percent) of executives polled said the pandemic has forced their agency to change their service offerings in some way. Among them, nearly half (48 percent) said they've amended their current service offerings, while nearly a third (29 percent) said they now offer new services in light of COVID-19. 16 percent said they've reduced the price of their services while an additional 16 percent said they've brainstormed new potential service offerings.

Only six percent said COVID-19 has resulted in the agency offering fewer services or increasing the current prices of its services.

DTC's survey polled 30 marketing and advertising agency executives between August and September. ○



## Crossroads Strategies reps Guardian disaster firm

Former Senators John Breaux (D-LA) and Trent Lott (R-MS) have signed on to represent Guardian Centers of Georgia, disaster preparedness and tactical training outfit.

Their firm, Crossroads Strategies, is lobbying to advance the value of operational readiness and security training in areas including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive response.

Crossroads executive VP Scott Brenner, who was Chief of External Affairs at the Office of Science and Technology at the Dept. of Homeland Security, joins the former Senators on the Guardian business.

Geoff Burkart, a 30-year veteran of AT&T, is founder and CEO of Guardian. He launched the company following his work in emergency management and response as aviation director at BellSouth during the Sept. 11 attacks and airlift operations during hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Breaux and Lott exited Breaux Lott Leadership Group in July. They sold that firm to Squire Patton Boggs in 2010. ○

## Ex-NY governor Paterson joins Kivvit

Former New York governor David Paterson has joined Kivvit, the PA and strategic communications shop.

The Democratic politico will provide strategic counsel and help Kivvit's managing partners develop and implement a diversity, equity and inclusion plan.

Paterson was Lieutenant Governor when he succeeded Governor Elliot Spitzer upon his resignation in 2008 due to a prostitution scandal. He is the Empire State's only Black governor.

Paterson said that he's worked with lot of PA firms, but none of them impressed him as much as Kivvit. "Their continued commitment to data, analytics and innovation is unparalleled in this space," he said in a statement.

Kivvit also announced the hiring of Josh Vlasto as Managing Director.

He was Press Secretary to NY Senator Chuck Schumer, Chief of Staff to governor Andrew Cuomo and head of corporate communications at MacAndrews and *Forbes*. ○



David Paterson

## Nokia dials up Koh for government relations post

Finnish telecom giant Nokia has recruited the State Dept's Grace Koh for its U.S. government relations department.

As US ambassador to the 2019 International Telecom Union's World Radiocommunication Conference in Egypt, she led the 125-member American delegation negotiating spectrum and satellite policy.

Koh also served as Special Assistant to the President for technology, telecom and cybersecurity policy in the White House and Deputy Chief Counsel to



Grace Koh



the House Energy and Commerce Committee's subcommittee on communications and technology.

Koh's extensive experience and background in the "cross-section of geopolitics, technology and trade will ensure our expertise continues to be respected in the policy debates both domestically and abroad," he added. ○

## Livingston Group reps Korean church tied to COVID

The Livingston Group is working for San Francisco Zion Church, which is an independent church associated with the South Korean religious sect linked to the spread of COVID-19.

South Korea in February traced the outbreak there to the Shinecheonji Church of Christ as more than 5,000 of its members were infected, which then represented nearly 40 percent of all cases in the country.

South Korea arrested Lee Man-hee, the 88-year-old leader of Shincheonji, in August on charges of "murder by willful negligence," embezzling and holding unapproved religious events.

Shincheonji supporters say South Korea's government is using it as a scapegoat to cover up its mismanagement of the pandemic.

"As a new and growing denomination, Shincheonji has become prey to misrepresentation and discrimination by mainstream churches and the secular media," Ki Lee, a spokesperson for the SF Zion Church, told *O'Dwyer's*.

Lee hopes to raise awareness of the misrepresentation of and discrimination toward the Shincheonji and its privacy concerns as U.S. citizens, and to encourage dialogue on these issues.

Former Louisiana Republican Congressman and Speaker-elect Bob Livingston launched TLG in 1999.

The firm's six-month contract went into effect Aug. 17 and is worth \$8,500 per month. The pact may be approved for an additional six months upon mutual agreement by both parties. ○

## Blue State adds veterans of Warren's presidential run

Blue State, which works with purpose-driven organizations, has hired Christopher Huntley and Rachel Kopilow, veterans of Sen. Elizabeth Warren's 2020 presidential bid.

Huntley, who served as Senior Speechwriter for Warren, joins the firm as VP of Strategic Communications. Kopilow, who ran the video team for the Warren campaign, comes to Blue State as VP of Strategic Communications and Creative Director. ○

## Bob Dole helps Armenia boost U.S. ties

Former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, 97, is working with Armenia to improve its diplomatic relations with the US ahead of strategic talks between the two nations slated for October.

His firm, Alston & Bird, will monitor current events relevant to U.S.-Armenia relations and may conduct outreach to Congress and the Trump administration.

A&B special counsel Dole was president Jerry Ford's VP running mate in 1976 and the Republican presidential nominee in 1996.

The U.S. embassy in Armenia's capital of Yerevan advised US citizens to avoid travel to the eastern part of the country near the border with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani forces killed an Armenian soldier on Sept. 16. Armenia's Defense Ministry has ordered its troops to maintain high-combat readiness. ○

## Fly Africa gets media support for downed plane

Fly Africa, based at Mogadishu Airport, has retained Bethesda law firm Schulman Bhattacharya to handle U.S. media inquiries surrounding the shooting down of an African Express cargo plane carrying humanitarian supplies over Somalia in May.

*The New York Times* reported that the Kenya-registered plane loaded with supplies to fight COVID-19 may have been shot down by Ethiopian troops, who thought it was about to carry out a suicide attack.

Fly Africa had been leasing the aircraft and had about 20 months

left on the lease at the time of the crash, according to SB's engagement letter.

SB's job is to intercede with authorities in Ethiopia, African Union Mission in Somalia peacekeeping force, African Union and the United Nations to negotiate compensation for the incident on an "informal basis."

While SB's core mission is providing legal support overseas, it registered with the Justice Dept. because it may have to field questions from the American media. ○

## Teneo reps investment firm of Russian oligarch

Teneo Strategy is slated to receive a \$150,000 monthly retainer from LetterOne Investment Holdings, the Luxembourg-based firm co-founded by Russian billionaire Mikhail Fridman.

The assignment to provide strategic counsel and stakeholder outreach to LetterOne and its board members began Sept. 1.

Teneo's engagement letter calls for scheduling media interviews, assisting with media briefings and coordinating stakeholder relations. It will not act as a political consultant.

Senior managing directors Paul Gallagher, former head of Burson-Marsteller's US crisis practice, and Kathleen Lacey, one-time executive VP for influencer engagement at Edelman, head the five-member LetterOne team.

*Forbes* estimates Fridman is worth \$15 billion.

He was a member of the US Treasury's "oligarchs watchlist," according to Reuters, but was never hit with sanctions. ○



Mikhail Fridman

### FARA News



## NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT FILINGS

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

**AZ Media PR Inc.**, White Plains, NY **registered Sep. 10, 2020 for Ministry of Petroleum**, Juba, South Sudan, regarding promotion of the development of South Sudan petroleum and country at large.

**Mr. Farhad Alaaldin**, Baghdad, Iraq, **registered Sep. 1, 2020 for Iraq Advisory Council**, Baghdad, Iraq. Mr. Alaaldin is the Chairman of the Iraq Advisory Council and works on a voluntary basis with the council seeking to enhance the civil society-state relationship, democratic process, rule of law and social justice in Iraq.

**Ghebi LLC**, Washington, D.C., **registered Sep. 14, 2020 for Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency**, Moscow, Russia. Rossiya Segodnya is a mass media company and acts fully independently based on its editorial policies. The registrant produces radio shows, newswires and web articles which are predominantly distributed by other entities.

### Lobbying News



## NEW LOBBYING DISCLOSURE ACT FILINGS

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

**Jeffrey J. Kimbell & Associates**, Wash., D.C., **registered Sep. 23, 2020 for Vaxart Inc.**, San Francisco, CA, regarding issues related to vaccine development.

**Co2Efficient LLC**, Wash., D.C., **registered Sep. 21, 2020 for Digital Climate Alliance**, Washington, D.C., regarding digital solutions for climate change.

**Fidelis Government Relations**, Wash., D.C., **registered Sep. 19, 2020 for EMITBio, Inc.**, Durham, NC, regarding COVID-19 treatment development issues.

**Hobart Hallaway & Quayle Ventures, LLC**, Nashville, TN, **registered Sep. 18, 2020 for Planet Fitness**, Hampton, NH, regarding economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Normandy Group, LLC**, Wash., D.C., **registered Sep. 18, 2020 for Awareness is Prevention**, Henderson, NV, regarding issues related to human trafficking.



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### J Public Relations

530 7th Ave., #502, New York, NY 10018

212/924-3600

letstalk@publicrelations.com

www.jpublicrelations.com

Employees: 65. Founded: 2005.

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

Established in 2005, the award-winning agency has consistently risen to become the country's fastest growing, bi-coastal agency in the travel and hospitality spaces. JPR's global roster includes more than 125 hotels in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Caribbean, Dubai, Europe, New Zealand, Asia and more. JPR steadily garners and retains notable clients including Relais & Châteaux, Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts, Vail Resorts Hospitality, Grace Hotels, InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown, Newport Beach & Company, Four Seasons Lanai and 15 Ritz-Carlton Hotels & Resorts.

JPR is listed on the Observer's annual "PR Power 50" as one of the country's most powerful PR firms. The agency also garnered "Top Places to Work" by PR News and "Agency of the Year" by Bulldog Reporter in addition to multiple trade and consumer awards for company culture and brand success.

Jamie Sigler O'Grady, Sarah Evans, partners

### Locations:

#### New York

530 7th Ave., #502, New York, NY 10018

212/924-3600

#### San Diego

2341 Fifth Ave., San Diego, CA 92101

619/255-7069

#### Los Angeles

429 Santa Monica Blvd., #280, Santa Monica, CA 90401

310/722-7066

#### London

14 Gray's Inn Rd., 3063, London, W1X 8HN, UK

(011) 44 (20) 38905838

### Sampling of highlighted clients:

Adare Manor, Ireland  
Adventures by Disney (project work)  
Aulani, a Disney Spa & Resort (project work)  
Chateau du Grand-Luce, France  
Chewton Glen, UK  
Cliveden House, UK  
Discover Baja California  
Four Seasons Resort Lanai  
Golden Oak Development by Walt Disney World Resort  
Grace Hotels  
Grand Hotel Tremezzo, Lake Como  
Gurney's Resorts - Montauk & Newport  
Helena Bay, New Zealand  
Hotel del Coronado  
InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown  
InterContinental, Washington DC - The Wharf  
Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts  
Newport Beach & Company  
Rancho La Puerta  
Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa  
Regent Seven Seas Cruises (project work)  
Relais & Châteaux  
The Palms and The Shore Club, Turks & Caicos  
The Private Suite at LAX  
The Resort at Pedregal  
The Ritz-Carlton Hotels (15 properties)  
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Jamie Sigler O'Grady & Sarah Evans, partners

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