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# O'Dwyer's Newsletter



The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

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April 1, 2019 Vol. 52 No. 13

## KENT STATE SEEKS ONLINE MARKETERS

Kent State University is soliciting proposals from agencies that can provide online marketing services for two of the Ohio public university's undergraduate and graduate programs.

KSU has issued an RFP for online marketing services in a bid to increase awareness and enrollment for its College of Public Health and its Department of Modern and Classical Language Studies. KSU's College of Public Health offers masters degree programs in five specialty public health areas: epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health sciences, social and behavioral sciences and health policy and management.

Part of the university's arts and sciences college, MCLS is the university's foreign language department.

Scope of the work includes search engine optimization, pay per click marketing, social media marketing, paid social media marketing, video production, website design and development, copywriting, graphic design and reporting services.

Deadline for proposals is 4:30 p.m. (EST) April 4. Proposals must be submitted via DocuSign at <https://www.kent.edu/procurement/bids>. RFP #1619.

Contact is Larry McWilliams, Procurement Department assistant manager, [lmccwilli@kent.edu](mailto:lmccwilli@kent.edu).

[Download the RFP \(PDF\).](#)

## XEROX SNAGS IBM VET SQUEO

Xerox Corp. has recruited Anne Marie Squeo as senior VP and chief communications and brand officer, a newly created position.

Squeo joins Xerox from IBM, where she most recently served as vice president, Watson, cloud & technology communications.

Earlier, she was head of corporate communications at Netflix, managing director at 30 Point Strategies and vice president of communications at Lockheed Martin.

Squeo has also worked as a staff writer at both Bloomberg News and the *Wall Street Journal*, where she was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 2000.

Xerox vice chairman and CEO John Visentin said that Squeo "will work closely with our team to drive a greater understanding and excitement about our transition to digital from physical and how we will lead and disrupt existing and new markets."



Anne Marie  
Squeo

## TOP 25 FIRMS POST 12.9% INCOME JUMP IN '18

Spectrum Science Communications, Imre, LLC and W2O Group powered the Top 25 independent PR firms to a 12.9 percent rise in combined 2018 fee income to \$2.1B and a 10.7 percent jump in employment to 11,702, according to O'Dwyer's Rankings of PR Firms released March 26.

W2O (+23.1 percent to \$177.6M) paced the gains among the Top 10 firms. Prosek Partners (+15.1 percent to \$47M), Zeno Group (+13.6 percent to \$73.4M), ICR (+9.0 percent to \$69.2M) and Finn Partners (+8.0 percent to \$88.1M) ranked as the other big gainers in the top grouping.

Edelman topped the list of independent firms with income of \$888.4M (down 0.6 percent).

Ruder Finn (No. 7 at \$69.1M) and MWWPR (No. 9 at \$42.6M) returned to Top 10 rankings. RF | Binder, Taylor and Peppercomm were the top 50 firms in 2017 to drop out of the rankings this year.

Spectrum earned the top gainer spot because "we renewed our focus on clients and increased capabilities in key areas to ensure we are delivering best-in-class interwoven programs," according to president Michelle Gross.

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

Leadership was reorganized into a strategy council of Wilson, Gross, Rob Oquendo (chief innovation officer), Michelle Strier (chief strategy officer), Scott Chesson (COO) and Jon Higgins (chief engagement officer).

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

Imre, the No. 2 leading gainer, attributed a portion of its success to a fiercely independent business model that clients find attractive when seeking an agency partner."

Noting that the shop has hired people with diverse backgrounds, Dave Imre said, "We've especially doubled down on strategy to bring more true human insights to the table. And we've also seen the industry renew its creative focus on leading with ideas, followed by technology, which we've always done."

In 2018, Imre acquired JMPR, which has more than 40 years of experience in the automotive sector. That deal "has helped us bolster our integrated approach for clients," said Imre.

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## **SARD VERBINNEN FLIES TO ASSIST BOEING**

Boeing turned to Sard Verbinnen for crisis support in the days following the crash of the Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crash, according to the *New York Times*.

The aerospace giant had been roundly criticized for its slow and lackluster response to the crisis, keeping its well-connected CEO Dennis Muilenburg out of sight as countries throughout the world banned 737 Max planes from their airspaces and airlines grounded fleets.

Richard Levick, DC crisis pro, told the Times that Boeing's initial response was "very engineering-esque," and lacked a "human face." He faulted Boeing for responding to the crisis as a "business-to-business company, rather than a business-to-consumer" issue.

The Times noted that Boeing, which keeps SVB on retainer, has become more assertive since the New York-based firm took command of the response to the 737 Max crash.

Muilenburg released a statement and video on March 18 to express regret for the Ethiopian and October Lion Air Flight 610 crashes and emphasized the company's commitment to safety.

SVB has not responded for comment.

## **SUPER BOWL PR VET TO WEBER SHANDWICK**

Andrea Mokros, VP-communications & events for the Minnesota Super Bowl Host Committee from 2015 to 2018, is now at Weber Shandwick as senior VP-corporate & PA in its Minneapolis office.



**Andrea Mokros**

The Super Bowl work included promoting Minnesota's "Bold North" marketing push.

Earlier, Mokros did a stint in the White House as special assistant to Barack Obama and director of strategic planning for Michelle Obama.

For the First Lady, she handled details for trips to China, Africa and the 2012 Olympics in London. Recently, she was part of the production team for the "Becoming" book tour. Mokros also worked for Minnesota Democrats Gov. Mark Dayton and Sen. Amy Klobuchar, and did advance work for John Kerry's presidential bid.

## **BCW FORMS CANNABIS CONSULTING GROUP**

BCW has launched a cannabis and hemp strategic consulting unit to help companies gain market entry, tackle regulatory challenges, communicate product benefits and engage consumers.

The move comes as the US legal marijuana market is expected to hit \$150B by 2025, according to Grand View Research, which pegged the 2016 market size at \$7B. Meanwhile, New Frontier Data's *Hemp Business Journal* predicts the hemp-derived cannabidiol (CBD) market will triple from \$390M in 2018 to \$1.3B in 2022.

Dan Doherty, executive VP & DC PA & crisis practice lead, spearheads the cannabis/hemp unit.

The WPP unit currently counsels PAX Labs, marketer of cannabis vaporization technologies/devices; Criticality, industrial hemp/CBD products, and Pyxus International, value-added agriculture.

## **MARX GROUP MERGES WITH EISBRENNER PR**

Marx Group (marketing communications) has merged with Eisbrenner PR to form Marx Buscemi Eisbrenner Group to bolster its strong position in the Midwest automotive, trucking, mobility, technology, consumer products sectors.

Frank Buscemi will be CEO/chief creative officer of the firm headquartered in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. Tom Eisbrenner will serve as president and Tom Marx will take the chairman/chief strategy officer position.

Buscemi and Eisbrenner began merger talks in October to join Marx's advertising, branding, digital and research savvy with Eisbrenner's PR capabilities.

"The foundational principles of both companies will continue here: being an extension of our clients' teams, providing great work and solid strategy and always continuing to learn," said Eisbrenner. His team will relocate from Royal Oak, Mich. To Bloomfield Hills later this spring and launch its new branding and website soon.

MBE Group will be part of the IPREX PR network.

## **PAGE TURNS PR OVER TO G&S**

The Arthur Page Society has tapped G&S Business Communications for pro bono PR duties, which had been handled by Text 100.

The firm will be responsible for strategy development, thought leadership, content creation and omnichannel distribution to promote the goals of the organization of senior corporate communications executives and to advance the leadership role of the chief communications officer.



**Luke Lambert**

Page president Roger Bolton thanked Text100, which joined fellow Next15 shop Bite to form Archetype on Sept. 1, for its work on rebranding and positioning the group as a global, diverse and cutting-edge association.

Luke Lambert, CEO of G&S, said Page is becoming "a driving force to unite the world's best communicators in learning from and with each other, and in becoming stronger leaders that help transform business for the better." G&S will initially focus its attention on the 2019 Page Spring Seminar, slated for April 4-5 in New York.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**Finn Partners** has been named PR agency for private vacation ownership company **Bluegreen Vacations**. The assignment was jointly awarded to Finn and Missy Farren & Associates, which Finn acquired last year. Finn and MFA will create and direct media relations, influencer programming, CSR and thought leadership initiatives for the Florida-based company. Finn's New York office leads the account.

BrandStar, a South Florida-based branded content marketing company, has been named agency of record for Decocrated, a home décor subscription box company. In addition to branded content development, the agency will provide digital strategy and services, media management, influencer marketing, and public relations for the company.



## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE RETAINS EMPLOYEES**

Work-life balance and a welcoming corporate culture are increasingly being seen as key factors in strengthening worker satisfaction and retaining employees over the long term, according to research released March 28 by FTI Consulting and women's leadership firm Mine The Gap.

The report, Culture at Work, asked 4,764 women and 1,030 men employed in the financial, legal, energy and healthcare industries to say what they thought were



the features that made a company a desirable place to work.

Work-life balance was at the top of list for both men and women, with 54 percent of female respondents and 50 percent of male respondents saying it was one of the top two features that made a company attractive. The second-most desired value (45 percent of women, 40 percent of men) was a corporate culture in which camaraderie and connectivity were a priority. Financial perks, inclusivity and innovation all lagged behind as contributors to a positive work environment.

The study also looked at the qualities that make for a negative work environment and result in employees, especially female employees, looking for the exits.

“Feeling undervalued” was the top reason women cited for leaving a workplace. About 62 percent of female respondents said that either they personally felt undervalued by their manager, or they had witnessed others being undervalued.

In addition, nearly half of female respondents said they had experienced such discriminatory behaviors as ineffective feedback from managers, being paid less than industry counterparts, being passed over for promotions despite meeting all of the criteria and being expected to be the note taker during a meeting—or even to clean up after office functions.

However, both men (80 percent) and women (82 percent) said they support a culture of respect and accountability in the workplace. There is also general agreement on the need for a company's actions to line up with its stated values.

Most respondents also believe that changing workplace culture for the better is an attainable goal, with 55 percent of women and 61 percent of men saying they think they can change the culture at their workplace.

“Our research belies a common myth that women leave their jobs solely due to family demands,” said Elizabeth Alexander, a senior managing director in the strategic communications segment at FTI. “Instead, the data demonstrates that the reasons for employee departures are much more nuanced. To remain competitive and viable in today's market, companies should carefully study their own workplace cultures.”

## **PORTER NOVELLI PACT IS SCRUTINIZED**

Porter Novelli administers a \$2.25M contract for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that has subcontracted with Republican media advisors to buff the image of the agency's administrator Seema Verma, according to a report in Politico.

“Verma, a close ally of Vice President Mike Pence, has become a lightning rod for pushing work requirements in Medicaid and spearheading the Trump administration's efforts to unilaterally unwind pieces of Obamacare,” Politico reported.

The subcontracted consultants performed a range of duties usually performed by CMS communications staff, such as handling media calls, joining Verma on promotional trips and writing her speeches.

Verma has also approved a contract with Nahigian Strategies, run by Keith and Ken Nahigian, both of whom have extensive GOP connections. The agency's staff have provided her with assistance on messaging strategy for close to two years. A source told Politico that Nahigian has been paid at least \$2 million for its work with CMS.



**Seema Verma**

CMS already has an in-house communications staff of approximately 200 people. Tom Corry, who joined the agency on March 4 from consulting firm Healthcare Data Insights & Analytics, said the outside contracts were due to lack of in-house staff.

Critics of the PR arrangement told Politico there are ethical and contractual problems with steering contracts to political allies, and possibly a violation of the ban on personal services.

“The HHS Inspector General should review this [Porter Novelli] contract and the activities under it to ensure they are proper,” said Scott Amey, general counsel of the Project on Government Oversight.

Frank Pallone, chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, today called for a Health and Human Services inspector general probe into CMS' PR spending, calling it a “highly questionable use of taxpayer dollars.”

## **EX NYPD DEP. COMMISSIONER TO BRUNSWICK**

Michael O'Looney, a one-time New York Police Dept. deputy commissioner and WCBS-TV news reporter, is joining Brunswick Group on May 1.

Most recently, O'Looney was communications head at Elliott Management and corporate communications chief at both Barclays/Americas and Merrill Lynch.

From his New York base, he will counsel clients on strategy, M&As, activism, crisis, and assorted reputational issues.

Brunswick also will bolster its San Francisco outpost on April 22 with the addition of Courtney Chiang Dorman.

Dorman will join from Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, where she was COO and previously chief marketing officer. Earlier, she was director of marketing communications at Robertson Stephens, technology investment firm.

## **BAD PUBLICITY CAN BOOST BRAND VALUE**

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

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

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

The study yielded a surprise finding: depending on their response to the event, brands can actually gain value following an incident in which a celebrity endorser generated negative publicity.

As with everything in a crisis, timing is key. In analyzing companies' speed of response, the nature of its response, and how that response impacted returns, the study discovered that a faster announcement or statement after an incident of negative publicity saw company value increasing over the next four trading weeks.

These results are predicated on a fast response. The study found the "window of opportunity" for companies responding to a negative event is small, and that the positive effects begin diminishing quickly (by -.184 percent) about 72 hours after the negative event becomes public.

One thing's for sure: a response is always warranted. The study discovered that some definitive action by a company is always better than offering no response at all.

"If the firm decides to remain quiet, investors do not receive any signal whether the firm is aware of the event, and motivated/capable to counteract the negative spillover effects," the study's authors wrote. "This ongoing uncertainty will lead investors to correct the initial reaction, and consequently stock returns will be more negative on the following days."

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

"Such willful deceit," the study's authors conclude, "will backfire immediately if it becomes public."

The report, "Managing Negative Celebrity Endorser Publicity: How Announcements of Firm (Non) Responses Impact Stock Returns," appears in *Management Science*, a peer reviewed journal published by the Institute for Operational Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS).

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

Chicago-based digital firm **Tech Image** has retained its agency-of-record relationship with **Bosch Power Tools** and **Bosch Thermotechnology**. In addition, the **Window & Door Manufacturers Association** has engaged the agency to manage outreach campaigns to residential builders and remodelers, and residential and commercial architects. Tech Image has been both Bosch divisions' agency of record since June 2015. Its work for WDMA includes building a promotional microsite for the association, handling its media relations, paid and organic social media, content development and strategic public relations. Katie O'Rourke, who has been with Tech Image since 2015, will manage all three accounts.



**Diffusion** has signed on as public relations agency of record for women's haircare company **Tyme**. As AOR, Diffusion will work to communicate how Tyme offers superior results and a positive user experience. Its campaign will use creative thought leadership to boost brand awareness for Tyme's products, emphasizing their time-saving qualities. The agency will also execute an in-depth reviews program that will showcase how Tyme's hot tools and products provide women with an all-in-one solution to their beauty routine.

**Gutenberg** has brought on **Rebel Foods, Inc.** and **Enerallies** as clients. Rebel Foods is a Pune, India based company that starts up "online restaurants." It currently has 200 cloud kitchens and more than 1500 virtual restaurants in India, and is expanding globally. Gutenberg is charged with establishing a media presence within the U.S. targeting the food delivery/technology industry and its investors. Enerallies, a smart, automated energy management company, has signed on for multi-phased PR and digital services to refresh and enhance its brand.

New York-based **Laura Davidson Public Relations** has opened a Chicago office. The agency has also re-



vamped its website, re-designed its logo, and expanded its services. The changes follow the hiring of new in-house digital media director Jera Sutton, who spearheads social media strategy. LDPR's expanded services include influencer marketing, multi-faceted brand partnerships, sponsored content and strategic social media programs. The agency's client roster includes Abercrombie & Kent, VisitScotland, Park Hyatt St. Kitts and Taj Hotels, Palaces and Resorts.

**Baerlein & Partners**, the firm founded by longtime Rasky Baerlein partner Joe Baerlein in 2017, has given its website an update to match the services it now offers clients. In addition to providing information on the firm's experience and outlining its approach to client projects, the new site takes visitors through several representative case studies. It also introduces prospective clients to the leaders of the partner firms who combine their services with Baerlein's offerings to form what he calls a "virtual agency."

## **NY SUES OPIOID MAKERS/DISTRIBUTORS**

New York State Attorney General Letitia James has filed a lawsuit against Purdue Pharma, members of the Sackler family, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Endo Health Solutions, Teva Pharmaceuticals and Allergan Finance, charging that deceptive marketing practices have played a strong role in the state's opioid epidemic.



**Letitia James**

The suit also targets drug distributors McKesson Corporation, Cardinal Health Inc., Amerisource Bergen Drug Corporation and Rochester Drug Cooperative Inc. It charges that drug manufacturers "collaborated to falsely deny the serious risks of opioid addiction generally, and high-dose opioid prescriptions specifically." In addition, it accuses manufacturers and distributors of obtaining licenses to sell opioids by falsely asserting that they had complied with state requirements governing their distribution.

The suit seeks to make the defendants change their business practices. It also demands compensation for New York State "through funding for prevention programs and medical treatment for affected New Yorkers" and aims to recover what it alleges are billions of dollars in profits fraudulently conveyed from Purdue Pharma to the members of the Sackler family who control the company.

## **WE'S GRANSTON SHIFTS TO SIGNAL LABS**

Jennifer Granston, a 19-year veteran of tech powerhouse WE Communications, has moved to media analytics company Signal Labs as head of strategy & insights, a newly created role.

Most recently, Granston was global chief operating officer & president insights & analytics at WE, the former Waggener Edstrom. Responsible for WE's global rebranding, research program design and implementation, Granston also counseled key clients.

At Signal, she will oversee the development and day-to-day execution of Signal Labs strategy & insights, an offering and team intended to provide brands with customized analysis and research intelligence.

## **JW CHILDS REBRANDS AFTER RAID**

JW Childs Assocs rebranded as Prospect Hill Growth Partners following the Feb. 22 raid of a Florida massage parlor that netted chairman/co-founder John Childs.



**John Childs**

The 77-year-old Childs, who stepped down Feb. 27, has dismissed the charge of soliciting prostitution lodged against him as "totally false."

The raid was part of an investigation into human trafficking that resulted in similar charges against New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft.

Prospect Hill will continue to operate under the leadership of Phil Damiano, Joe Fortunato, Mitchell Eisenberg and Lewis Gold, operating partners under JW Childs Assocs. The Boston-area private equity firm has invested more than \$2.5B in 35 portfolio companies.

## **MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE HIRES QORVIS**

Qorvis Communications has signed a one-year \$810K contract to represent the Saudi Arabia-based Muslim World League and its push to clarify the true message of Islam. The MWL says it propagates the religion of Islam, elucidates its principles and tenets and refutes suspicious and false allegations made against the religion.

Founded in 1962, the Mecca-headquartered League is ready to help Muslims solve problems facing them anywhere in the world, employing all means that are not at variance with Sharia law while rejecting acts of violence, according to its website.

Qorvis supports the client via media consulting, strategic communications, press outreach, content production and social media enhancement.

Saudi Arabia is the leading contributor to the MWL.

Qorvis, which is part of France's Publicis Groupe, is Saudi Arabia's go-to PR firm.

## **MAGRINO EARNS MATRIX AWARD**

Magrino chairman and CEO Susan Magrino is among the female media professionals to be honored at the 2019 Matrix Awards, which will be held May 6 at the Sheraton New York Times Square.

The Matrix Awards have been given out annually since 1970 by New York Women in Communications, a nonprofit organization that works to empower women in the communications industry. "Morning Joe" co-host Mika Brzezinski, a former Matrix Award winner, will emcee this year's awards ceremony.



**Susan Magrino**

In addition to Magrino, the honorees include BET Networks chief marketing and communications officer Jeanine D. Liburd; Pfizer executive vice president, chief corporate affairs officer Sally Susman; Hearst Magazines chief content officer Kate Lewis and "CBS This Morning" co-host Norah O'Donnell.

To attend the Matrix Awards, pursue sponsorship possibilities or get more information about the event, go to the NYWICI website.

## **ON THE MOVE**

**The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** has hired **Marshall Stowell** as its first-ever VP for communications. Before joining the Foundation, Stowell spent 14 years with global health organization Population Services International, most recently serving as VP for external relations and communications. In his new role, Stowell leads an in-house team of communicators and oversees all external and internal communications for the Foundation.

**Buffalo Groupe, LLC** and its **Buffalo Agency**, which represents golf, sport and lifestyle brands, has named **Derek Koenig** chief creative and content officer. Koenig joins Buffalo from Discovery, Inc. where he was SVP creative for the company's in-house agency. He also founded Two Step Consulting in Boulder, Colorado, where he worked with brands like Qwest, Sony, Nike and the Victors & Spoils creative crowd-sourcing agency.



## TOP 25 FIRMS POST 12.9% INCOME JUMP IN '18

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### No Categories, Just Solutions at W2O

W2O CEO Jim Weiss credited his firm's robust performance to its effort to redefine the communications and marketing landscape "with no lines between and among categories." Launched by Weiss in 2001, the firm has invested heavily in data analytics/insights, digital/ social media, content creation/activation and strategic consulting.

He said the firm's client-centric approach has attracted more than 24 of the top 25 pharmaceutical companies to its roster and a growing number of *Fortune* 500 clients. "W2O prides itself on always working hard to punch above its weight because it's on a mission to improve healthcare and the patient experience," said Weiss.

### Zeno Keeps Rolling Along

Zeno CEO Barby Siegel said 2018 marked the ninth consecutive year of double-digit growth for the firm. It was up 17 percent in the US and 13.6 percent overseas. More than half (54 percent) of Zeno's revenues stemmed from multinational sources, up from 46 percent in 2017.

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

"While innovation is at the heart of the firm, we continue to invest in our core competency of earned media relations while pushing forward into new and rapidly evolving spaces such as paid social, owned newsrooms, data-driven story-telling and content developed specifically to optimize search," said Siegel.

### Acquisitions, Business Wins Drive Finn

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

That acquisition drive continued into 2019 with the purchase of Small Army, a Boston-based digital story-telling agency and the addition of Moorgate Communications in London, a financial services specialist firm

"Our growth during the first quarter of 2019 has been unprecedented, especially in terms of new business," said Peter Finn, founding partner. "When combined with our two acquisitions this year, we're on a path that will deliver stronger growth this year than in 2018."

The firm also stepped up its hiring, adding 34 staffers during the past 13 months.

### HealthUnlimited Poised for Rebound

Following a 6.6 percent dip in fee income to \$24.3M last year, HealthUnlimited CEO Tim Bird said the firm entered 2019 with a solid base of growing clients and is positioned for growth with expanded capabilities and presence.

The firm strengthened creative and digital engagement capabilities with senior leadership hires. "Our aligned global leadership team welcomed new senior leaders in the UK: Ann Bartling, PR practice; Jon Watson, executive creative; Per Hedman, digital engagement; Jason Galla-Barth, brand promotion, along with Dan Burgess, US digital engagement leader," according to Bird.

"We have renewed our commitment to training and development initiatives, as well as our commitment to diversity and inclusion, which has already resulted in a significant increase in a more diverse and aware workforce," Bird added.

### 5W PR Posts 17.7% Across-the-Board Gain

5W Public Relations CEO Ronn Torossian said the firm's 17.7 percent gain in fee income to \$32.4M came from across its practice areas.

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

The firm added staff to its corporate, technology, consumer and digital teams. "We won consumer, corporate and fast-growing technology companies and do great work for them," said Torossian.

### Infinite Global Exceeds Expectations

Jamie Diaferia reported that Infinite Global posted an 18.6 percent surge in fee income to \$8.1M last year.

"We exceeded our ambitious expectations by hitting three key metrics: at least 15% growth (with a cap of 20% to make sure we don't exceed our ability to hire responsibly); a minimum of 20% profit margin; and 50-55% staff costs," he explained.

Diaferia focused on four primary drivers: diversifying services, investing in marketing generating more revenue from existing clients, and limiting staff and client turnover. He said Infinite Global has hit every goal in the seven-year growth plan that it established in 2015.

### Racepoint Rebuilds

Racepoint Global experienced key client losses in 2018, including its long-standing relationships of seven and nine years with AT&T and IBM, respectively. Fee income dropped 16.8M to \$20.9M.

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

He told O'Dwyer's: "Racepoint has started 2019 off strong, exceeding Q1 growth targets, and we are optimistic about the year ahead."

The Top 50 firms registered a 14.1 percent gain in income to \$2.4 and a 13.3 rise in employment to 12,048.

The Top 100 posted fees of \$2.6B (up 13.4 percent) and employment of 14,915 (up 12.8 percent).



Barby Siegel



Ronn Torossian



Peter Finn



Larry Weber

## COMMENTARY

**He's sooooo hard to figure out.** Barely two days following a smashing vindication and total exoneration by his hand-picked attorney general, president Trump launched an all-out offensive on his white whale, ObamaCare.



**Kenan Thompson**

As SNL's Kenan Thompson used to sing, "What's Up With That?"

Does the tweeter-in-chief really want to be re-elected president, a position that would provide protection against legal assaults? Who knows?

Does he want Democrats to increase their number of seats in the House and make a decent run of taking over the Senate in 2020? It sure looks that way.

Republicans got hammered in the 2018 midterms because they posed a threat of killing health insurance which covers more than 20M Americans.

Would you like to be a poor embattled GOP consultant next year, advising your client that a "Repeal and Eliminate" slogan is a sure-fire political winner?

Are voters yearning for cold-hearted politicians in favor of stripping Obamacare's coverage of pre-existing conditions and the provision that allows adults under the age of 26 to remain on their parents' policies?

Trump promises that Republicans "will soon be known as the party of healthcare," which is pretty hilarious for a group that voted more than 50 times during Obama's presidency to kill Obamacare without putting forward much of an alternative.

A possible reason for Trump's move to squash healthcare: the impending release of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on meddling in the 2016 election.

It's worth noting that AG Bob Barr's summary of Mueller's report did not find Team Trump "conspired or coordinated with Russia in its efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election."

The special counsel, however, did not draw a conclusion on whether Team Trump obstructed justice.

A diversionary assault on Obamacare may be just what the Spin Doctors prescribed for the president as the country awaits Mueller's report.

**And speaking of Mueller's report,** more Americans care about March Madness than about whether the president obstructed justice, according to a survey conducted by Finn Partners.

Nearly three-in-ten (28.6 percent) of the 3,000 Americans polled by Finn Partners expressed more interest in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, while 23.2 percent say the special counsel's findings are more important.

Before CBS jacks on the ad rates for the Final Four showdown, nearly half of respondents (48.2 percent) said

nyet to both the tourney and Mueller's probe.

Mueller fans are in the northeast as his report edged out basketball by a 28 to 25 percent margin, while the south votes for March Madness by 34 percent to 21 percent.

Older Americans show greater interest in the report with women over age 65 setting the pace.

The Gen Z crowd is three times more interested in the big sports event than the report, though more than half of the them (54 percent) say "meh" to basketball and Mueller.

NCAA semifinals Michigan State vs. Texas Tech and Auburn vs. Virginia are slated for April 6. The final is scheduled for April 8.

Attorney General Bob Barr is expected to release Mueller's report the following week.

Stay tuned.

**PR lightning strikes twice.** The TWA fuselage plucked down in Times Square on March 23 and 24 drew a lot of good local press. It reminded me of Yogi Berra's line about "it being déjà vu all over again."

"Connie," the 1958 Lockheed Constellation that is fated to be a cocktail lounge at the TWA Hotel at JFK International Airport, brought to mind the ½ scale model of the supersonic British Airways Concorde, that once sat four stories high atop the then-Hansen's Brewery, directly across from One Times Square.

New York PR guru Tom Goodman was a co-pilot in the Concorde project. Since the TWA promo, he's been swamped with emails from friends, asking, "Wasn't that your idea?"

Ever the humble PR guy, Goodman told O'Dwyer's, "It was actually British Airways and its agency, M&C Saatchi, that envisioned and executed the plan to bring the world's largest airplane model to Times Square in 1996."

The PR ace said some of the best publicity happened before the plane, which had been "parked" on Seventh Ave., was hoisted atop the brewery.

"I distinctly remember a NYPD traffic cop walking by the scene, and I thought it would be fun if the plane received a "parking ticket," he said. "She obliged, and the resulting photograph of her writing a ticket was one of the defining pictures from the entire project."

The model was removed from Hansen's when its lease expired in 2001. The last Concorde flight flew from New York to London in 2003.

BA donated the model to the "Cradle of Aviation Museum" on Long Island.

A curator at the Aviation Museum called the Concorde model "one of the strange, oddball attractions in New York."

Strange or oddball, some 8.5M people saw the Times Square Concorde each day. —Kevin McCauley