



Kevin McCauley
Editor-in-Chief

O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



271 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016
212/679-2471. Fax: 212/683-2750
www.odwyerpr.com; jobs.odwyerpr.com

April 25, 2022 Vol. 55 No. 17

OMNICOM POSTS FLAT Q1; PROFIT DROPS

Omnicom CEO John Wren reported a 0.5 percent dip in Q1 revenues to \$3.4B and a 24.2 percent decline in operating profit to \$353M.



John Wren

He cites the negative impact of foreign currency translations and drop in acquisition revenue, net of disposition revenues for the lack-luster performance.

The FleishmanHillard, Ketchum, Marina Maher Communications, Mercury, Portland and Porter Novelli-led PR group posted a 13.7 percent increase in revenues to \$360.9M. Organically, it grew

14 percent. Omnicom's results include a \$113.4M charge connected to the war in Ukraine. That write-up is primarily due to the sale or planned divestiture of its businesses in Russia.

Wren warns the global challenges stemming from the war in Ukraine, COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and supply chain disruptions could cause economic uncertainty and volatility.

That impact will vary by geographic market and discipline.

Wren stands ready to align Omnicom's cost structure to meet any reduction in client spending or creditworthiness to better manage the company's working capital.

HARRIS COMMS DIRECTOR TO POWELL TATE

Ashley Etienne, who was deputy assistant to president Biden and communications director for vice president Harris, joins Powell Tate, the public affairs unit of The Weber Shandwick Collective, as senior counselor.

Etienne has also served as communications director and senior advisor to Nancy Pelosi and director of communications for Rep. Elijah Cummings.



Ashley Etienne

Based in Washington, D.C., she will provide senior counsel to clients in Powell Tate's public affairs, crisis and issues management, corporate, social impact, and diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

"Her knowledge of Congress and the White House, deep relationships

with the media and mastery of crisis communications will be invaluable to clients, especially as we partner with trusted brands to navigate new disruptions and shifts in culture and society," said Paul Massey, president of Powell Tate.

MAINE NEEDS ECODEV FOR LORING AF BASE

The State of Maine is looking for a firm to handle a \$400K economic development and marketing services push to encourage businesses to establish operations at the former Loring Air Force Base.

Currently only 367K sq. ft of the 2.7M sq. ft of available space is occupied by tenants and property owners. Twenty-three organizations lease space.

Though many buildings are in disrepair, about 550K sq. ft of space are in "ready to move in" condition.

Maine is looking to attract offices, data centers, manufacturing/food processing facilities, warehouses and restaurants/hotels for Loring.

The Pine Tree State's partner will redesign the Loring Development Authority's website, manage social media, create/distribute a newsletter, produce promotional materials, conduct targeted business visits and attend trade shows/events.

It will sign a two-year contract and kick off the campaign in June.

Responses are due May 3 at the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services at Proposals@maine.gov.

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



FINN WORKS TO BURNISH IMAGE OF UAE

[Finn Partners](#) has inked a \$1.3M six-month contract with the Ministry of Presidential Affairs for the United Arab Emirates to develop a communications strategy designed to bolster the image of the Gulf State.

The contract, which went into effect Aug. 27, calls for Finn Partners to "develop a qualitative and quantitative understanding of the current state of the UAE's image and soft power in terms of influence and impact on international affairs both regionally and globally."

It will identify areas of improvement for the UAE's soft power strategies.

Finn Partners will devise an "image enhancement action plan" that includes initiatives, objectives, stakeholder mapping, implementation and engagement strategy focused on priority countries of interest.

The firm's fees are to be paid monthly and split into 70 percent retainer and 30 percent deliverables.

Barry Reicherter, managing partner in Finn Partners' global intelligence unit, handles the UAE work.



LIBYA VOTES FOR PODESTA

Tony Podesta is working to assure the Biden administration, Congress and the US media that the Government of Libya is committed to conducting free and fair elections this year.



Tony Podesta

Libya's first presidential election was scheduled for Dec. 24, 2021, but failed to take place as rival factions could not agree on the political framework required to conduct the vote.

The US, which "temporarily" relocated its Libyan embassy from Tripoli to Tunis (Tunisia) in 2015, says its official policy is to "promote the ability of Libyans to achieve a unified and inclusive government."

Doing business as Podesta.com, Podesta shall push the dual purpose of maintaining political gains for the Libyan Government and advancing stability in Libya to foster agreement on a constitutional basis for elections in 2022.

Its contract is with Tala Elemery Consulting Middle East, a UAE-based outfit that is retained and directed by Libya.

NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE SEEKS COMMS. CHIEF

The New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs is seeking a director of communications and speechwriting. The director of communications and speechwriting works with the commissioner, deputy commissioners and other stakeholders to develop messaging and identify opportunities for press and social media engagements that achieve the strategic communications plans of the IA office.

Job duties include creating press releases and advisories, coordinating and overseeing the creation of social media assets and written pieces and other communications assets, as well as developing remarks and talking points, representing the commissioner and broader office and serving as the main point of contact for media inquiries.

All prospective applicants should upload a copy of their resume, a cover letter and three references [here](#).

[Download the job listing \(PDF\)](#).

AFFIRM'S IR CHIEF TAKES TENEO SPOT

Ronald Clark, VP-IR at San Francisco-based fintech company Affirm, has joined Teneo as managing director of its SF outpost.



Ronald Clark

Affirm is in the midst of a \$300M deal to acquire Returnly, which processes more than \$1B in online annual package returns for more than 1,800 retailers.

Clark joined Affirm from Eventbrite, where he crafted its investment narrative and expanded the investor base as the company recapitalized and restructured its business during the early stage of

the COVID-19 pandemic. He also was IR head for Yelp and director of corporate development at Levi Strauss & Co.

Clark began his career as a senior research analyst at Alliance Bernstein and covered global media and consumer sectors at JP Morgan and Credit Suisse.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Just three weeks after its rollout, CNN's heavily publicized streaming platform CNN+ is shutting down. The service is slated to cease programming on April 30, about a month after its March 29 launch. Current CNN+ subscribers "will receive prorated refunds of subscription fees," the company said in a statement. A report by competitor CNBC had suggested that CNN+ was off to a tepid start, attracting fewer than 10,000 viewers a day. CNN invested hundreds of millions into the platform and conducted a months-long marketing blitz touting the service, hired hundreds of new employees and tapped top talent to host programs, including "Fox News Sunday" anchor Chris Wallace, NBC's Kasie Hunt and former NPR co-host Audie Cornish. The service was intended to complement CNN's TV broadcast, featuring programming from CNN staples, along with access to CNN's library of original content. CNN+ did not feature CNN's regular live programming, due to the current deals it has with cable distributors. The news comes less than a month after CNN's former parent company, WarnerMedia, merged with Discovery to form Warner Bros. Discovery.



The New York Times names Joe Kahn, who has been the paper's managing editor since 2016, to the paper's top newsroom job. Kahn will become executive editor when current executive editor Dean Baquet exits the position, which is expected to happen in June. Kahn served as China correspondent for *The Dallas Morning News* and editor and publisher of *The Far Eastern Economic Review* before coming to the Times in 1998. In addition to serving as managing editor, his posts at the paper have included Beijing bureau chief, deputy foreign editor and international editor. "Joe brings impeccable news judgment, a sophisticated understanding of the forces shaping the world and a long track record of helping journalists produce their most ambitious and courageous work," said Times publisher A.G. Sulzberger in a memo to its staff.



Joe Kahn

Infowars, the website founded by Alex Jones, has filed for bankruptcy. Jones has placed Infowars under the control of outside administrators, who have put the company under Chapter 11 protection in an attempt to hold off litigation as the company tries to resolve legal claims against it. Jones was held liable by courts in both Connecticut and Texas for defaming families of the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting through his claims that the families were actors and the deaths of the shooting's victims were faked. A formal damages reward has not yet been made by either court. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*, plaintiffs in the Texas case claimed that Jones drew about \$18 million between 2018 and 2021 from Free Speech Systems, which operates Infowars.

Wendy Rieger, who anchored the 5 p.m. newscast on Washington, DC's NBC4 for more than two decades, died on April 16 following a battle with glioblastoma. After getting her start in journalism at American University's WAMU, she subsequently served as a weekend reporter for CNN and joined NBC4 as a reporter in 1996. She became a news anchor in 1996, and retired from that position in 2021.

THAT TIME PR SAVED THE EPA

Executives in our industry want to change the world. Their level of ambition isn't eclipsed by recent college graduates or other professionals reinventing themselves and returning to the workforce. Frankly, I love my work "fighting the good fight," countering threats in the public interest. For example, in April 2017, John O'Grady, AFGE National Council president of EPA Locals #238, called declaring the EPA union was at an existential crossroads.



Aric Caplan

Nearly 9,000 union members, all federal workers, had "a target on their backs," O'Grady said. White House adviser Stephen Bannon [vowed](#) to "the deconstruction of the administrative state." During the ensuing 22 months, we fought to save the EPA by engaging national and local journalists and broadcasters and leveraging essential PR tactics with a measure of good luck.

EPA administrator Scott Pruitt, and later Andrew Wheeler, ignored the public interest and played favorites regularly with political elites and energy industry cronies. From the outset, political appointees intimidated, surveilled, and "encouraged" retirements upon thousands who were apolitical and known to serve customarily in nonpartisan roles. EPA bosses derided their own employees as "nameless, faceless bureaucrats" and drove untold numbers of career professionals to quit.

We quickly messaged union leaders and prepared them to speak as private citizens who were expert scientists, engineers and lawyers. In 2017, saving the EPA addressed vulnerabilities after [Hurricane Harvey](#) triggered Texas chemical plants to leak and superfund sites to leech pollutants, requiring major EPA cleanups. Months earlier, government memos threatened to close laboratories in Houston's EPA Region 6 and San Francisco's Region 9, citing "budgetary reasons."

Pruitt and Wheeler reflexively alleged federal overreach by former EPA chiefs. Faithful to their free-market orthodoxy of blaming "burdensome regulations," but antithetical to the established purpose of EPA, it was unclear exactly what avowed conservatives were conserving. Instead of applying rigorous science in policymaking, the proverbial fox guarded the henhouse all four years. Soon, the EPA acted [ostensibly](#) as a "Business Environment" Protection Agency.

Unyielding, we portrayed authentic labor voices and the work of dedicated civil servants in news media to counteract widespread acrimony from EPA management. Frequent [TV](#) and [radio](#) news coverage, [reporter briefings](#), [public events](#), [advertising](#), [digital](#) and social media strengthened their storytelling to save the EPA. Timely op-eds, for instance, identified the [three women](#) who stood up to protect the American people and lost their jobs. After the EPA union joined the effort to "[Boot Pruitt](#)," one of the most scandal-plagued Cabinet officials ever, he resigned.

Trump pressed on, advocating the L.E.A.N. management philosophy where Less Employees Are Needed. Several months before the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, 35 days, he tried [union-busting](#). Despite that, our job was to cast a bright light on the integrity of the embattled union membership, whose morale working at EPA was sinking. On the surface, they seemed unflappable. Some brave

federal employees among the 380,000 [furloughed](#) spoke out to mainstream media audiences, nationally and in local media about their plight, while 420,000 others worked without pay. Ultimately, the union prevailed.

According to a [major study](#) into the role of PR firms in climate change politics, Brown University recently found many successful and renowned firms in the coal/steel/rail, gas, oil and utilities sectors continue to deny science and advance agendas for the fossil fuels industry. I say it's time for PR to cut ties with fossil fuel clients.

Aric Caplan is president of [Caplan Communications](#), an agency he founded in 2004 to champion the conservation, environmental and renewable energy sectors.

DIGITAL AD SPENDS SOAR 35%

U.S. digital advertising experienced record-breaking growth in 2021, according to a new study by ad industry trade group the Interactive Advertising Bureau and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP.

Overall, digital ad revenue in the U.S. climbed 35 percent year-over-year to account for more than \$189 billion in 2021, according to the report. That record-setting growth is nearly three times the modest 12 percent gains the industry saw in pandemic 2020 and accounts for the largest gains in digital ad spends in the U.S. in 16 years, when digital advertising grew for \$17 billion in 2006.

Ad revenues were consistently strong throughout the year, according to the report, with much of this digital media windfall driven by gains made in digital video, which was up 51 percent, accounting for total revenues of \$40 billion. Other top-growing ad channels included digital audio—which includes podcasts, streamed music and radio—which grew 58 percent to \$4.9 billion, as well as social media (up 39 percent to \$57.7 billion), mobile (up 37 percent to \$135 billion) and search (up 33 percent to \$78.3 billion).

The report also noted that 10 digital publishers and platforms accounted for more than three-quarters—78.6 percent—of total digital ad revenue last year. However, that share remains relatively flat when compared to 2020's 78.1 percent, and the report suggests that ad spend growth among these channels has slowed in recent years, with an explosion of new online businesses in 2021 now driving an increased share of this ad growth.

COLORADO COUNTY SEEKS COVID MEDIA PUSH

El Paso County, which has about 750K people and is anchored by Colorado Springs, is looking for a bilingual English and Spanish media campaign to bolster awareness of the risks posed by COVID-19.

The effort will cover prevention measures, treatments and therapeutic options that are available in Colorado's most populous county.

The Dept. of Public Health is "looking for comprehensive social/digital and traditional media marketing strategies, content development, media buys, and ad placement," according to the RFP. The consultant will work closely with El Paso's public health officials.

The campaign is to kick off mid-July and run through May 2023. Proposals are due May 4 at the Rocky Mountain E-Purchasing portal.

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



YAI SEEKS PARTNER TO BOOST ITS VISIBILITY

YAI, the New York-based non-profit that provides services to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, is looking for a creative partner to bolster its visibility.



YAI's 4K staffers provide supportive housing, education, rehabilitation, behavioral support, crisis intervention and other services to more than 20K people with I/DD in metro New York and California.

Though unrestricted fundraising has climbed in recent years, YAI still struggles to attract individual donors outside of the current pool of family members, corporate and foundation sponsors, according to its RFP.

The organization "seeks strategies and programs that will massively and sustainably amplify our visibility among the general public."

YAI is looking for earned/paid media, brand positioning, out-of-home advertising, social media and thought leadership opportunities. Its in-house advancement and communications team can implement recommendations including templates for new creative work, media outreach, etc.

YAI has budgeted from \$225K to \$275K to support the communications drive.

Firms need to contact YAI at awarenessRFP@yai.org by April 28 to express their interest in pitching the business. Proposals are due May 20.

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

FGH PICKS UP \$1.2M ASSIGNMENT FROM DRC

Finsbury Glover Hering has signed a \$1.2M one-year strategic communications & government affairs pact with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The firm also will provide research, website services and collateral development to advance DRC's engagement with the US Millennium Challenge Corp. and other organizations in order to promote its economic objectives.

The contract, which was signed April 5, prohibits the DRC from hiring any FGH staffer working on the account for a year following termination of the contract.

FGH has Brett O'Brien, Lars Anderson, Lindsay Lee Plack and Phillip Carter working on the DRC business.

SILICON VALLEY PIONEER KELLY DIES AT 64

Alan Kelly, who founded Applied Communications Group in 1992 in Silicon Valley, died April 13. He was 64.

Founded before the explosion of Internet usage, Applied ranked among the Top Ten technology firms with more than 60 staffers in San Francisco, Washington and Amsterdam.



Alan Kelly

Kelly also lectured on strategic communications at the University of Maryland, served as a political analyst at SiriusXM and blogged at HuffPost.

Hewlett-Packard, Sun Microsystems, Oracle, VeriSign, Cisco, StorageTek and PayPal were among its clients.

Kelly sold Applied's PR and communications research unit to Britain's Next 15, parent of Bite Communications in Text 100, in 2003. He then launched Playmaker Systems in Bethesda in 2006 to help professionals anticipate moves in their markets.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Allison+Partners launches Allison+Sports, a sports marketing specialty which will work with brands' existing and planned sports sponsorships, athlete and celebrity endorsements and other marketing relationships to deliver integrated marketing strategy and execution, with an emphasis on earned media. The new specialty is also introducing a proprietary, data-driven tool called the Earned Performance Scorecard, which benchmarks how brand are doing with their sports investments; evaluates brands against best-in-class and competitive sets; and builds insights and strategy to inform future campaigns, programs and investments.



Stagwell acquires **Brand New Galaxy**, which provides scaled commerce and marketplace solutions for more than 150 brands and 500e-retailers worldwide. Stagwell says the acquisition will expand the reach of its global e-commerce offerings. BNG has been a partner of Stagwell via its Global Affiliate Program since 2021 and is the first acquisition Stagwell has made of one of its affiliates. It will join the Stagwell Media Network.

UK-based agency **The Romans** has opened its first overseas office in Brooklyn, NY. Global advertising agency Mother has a minority stake in the business and will be sharing its US Brooklyn home with The Romans. The office, which has already signed on clients within the tech and retail spaces, will be led by newly recruited partner and executive vice president Sarah Jenkins. She joins the agency from experiential marketing agency NVE and was previously senior vice president at BCW.

Novitas Communications acquires the CCO-CMO Roundtable from Anne McCarthy, founder and president of Westmeath Global Communications and 6x6 Careers, LLC. The Roundtable is an invitation-only off-the-record gathering for senior marketing and communications professionals. In addition to discussing industry trends and peer-to-peer sharing of issues and experiences, each meeting typically highlights a members' actual business challenge and the success or failure behind the strategy.



Anne McCarthy

Landor & Fitch, a specialist brand and design group, opens a studio at the Waterfront Innovation Centre in Toronto, where it will be co-located with other WPP agencies. The new studio will be led by Scott Beffort, who has spent the last nine years with TAXI, where he has led the growth of their strategic design offering as president of Signal. Landor & Fitch Canada's client roster includes the Toronto Blue Jays, Dell and Walmart. "Landor & Fitch will be a rich complement to our current services in Canada," said Arthur Fleishman, Country Manager for WPP in Canada.

Vibrant Brands, a Latham, NY firm that provides digital marketing, design, website development, video and branding services to nonprofits, businesses and government agencies, is celebrating 20 years in business by donating a total of \$20,000 to different organizations throughout the year. Charities receiving funds include the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society, Pride Center of the Capital Region, Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY, Alzheimer's Disease Association and NAACP New York State.

INTERPUBLIC GETS FAMOUS

Interpublic has acquired a stake in The Famous Group, a Los Angeles-based company that creates mixed and augmented reality for sports and other live events.



Launched in 1997, TFG has worked with the NFL (17 Super Bowls), NCAA Final Four, US Open, NBA, PGA, WWE and Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

It has handled projects for Dunkin' Donuts, Nike, AT&T, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Fox and Lyft.

Interpublic CEO Philippe Krakowsky, said the investment in TFG will “accelerate the pace at which we move to deliver the next generation of live events, with scalable technology platforms and a deeper connection to our tata resources and capabilities.”

Though TFG will continue to operate under its brand and retain the ability to work independently with existing and future clients, it will be aligned with IPG’s Momentum Worldwide, experiential marketing arm.

MEXICAN POLITICO SIGNS ON AT FTI

Javier Treviño, CEO of Mexico’s Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (Business Coordinating Council), has signed on as a senior advisor at the Latin American practice of FTI Consulting’s strategic communications unit.



Javier Treviño

Prior to his appointment to the CCE, he was a member of Mexico’s Congress. He also served as the country’s deputy foreign minister, deputy education minister, deputy finance minister for administration and spokesperson at the US embassy.

“Over the last three years, Javier has had a front-row seat to all the major unfolding policy, political and regulatory issues that materially impact the business sector in the country,” said Pablo Zárate, a senior managing director in FTI’s stratcomm segment.

Before his government work, Treviño was senior VP for corporate communications and PA at CEMEX, a building materials giant that has operations in more than 50 countries.

GRASSROOTS VET VERGHESE JOINS APCO

Nina Vergheese, who has more than ten years of experience running grassroots and grasstops communications campaigns, has joined APCO Worldwide as senior director and head of its campaigns and advocacy practice.



Nina Vergheese

She takes over for Dan Meyers, who is now deputy managing director of APCO/DC focused on business development.

Most recently, Vergheese was at Locust Street Group in Washington, handling federal, state and local advocacy efforts. Earlier, she worked at Burson-Marsteller and its Direct Impact arm.

Vergheese has strong ties to the Republican party. She was national coalitions director for Jon Huntsman’s presidential run, deputy regional political director for the Republican National Committee and a staffer at George W. Bush’s White House.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Colangelo & Partners wins **Wines of Georgia**, the organization that represents and promotes the wines of the country of Georgia. The partnership will focus on engaging new and current consumers through strategic media relations, events, trade marketing activations and partnerships. The agency’s “expertise in integrated communications and deep knowledge of the wine industry and connections in the wine trade and consumer media will allow us to achieve our goals of introducing Georgian wines to a wider audience,” said chairman of Georgia’s National Wine Agency Levan Mekhuzla.



Rubenstein Public Relations is named agency of record for **Paradigm Biopharmaceuticals**, a company that repurposes existing drugs for unmet medical needs. RPR will provide counsel to Paradigm on their corporate messaging and guide the development of their brand positioning in the US and global markets. Paradigm has announced the expansion of their US operations to support a phase III registration study for Zilosul®, a potential therapy for osteoarthritis of the knee. “RPR is well-equipped to guide our company across the US media landscape,” said Paradigm CMO and interim CEO, Dr. Donna Skerrett.

CIIC PR is selected to lead PR efforts for the **voco Times Square South**. CIIC will assist in creative programming and brand awareness development for the property in the US market through integrated public relations strategies. Launched in 2018, voco Hotels is a premium brand affiliated with IHG Hotels & Resorts that currently operates 31 voco hotels around the world with an additional 43 in the global pipeline.

Next PR is providing pro bono PR services for **Brewability**, an Englewood, CO-based restaurant that employs adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to brew and serve craft beer and pizza. Next PR will help generate awareness around Brewability’s mission and upcoming announcements. The restaurant is Next PR’s eighth client partner for its Conscious Capitalism program, which works with nonprofits and startups in need of pro bono PR services.



Walt & Company is named agency of record for e-commerce platform and marketplace provider **Promenade Group**. The agency will operate as an extension of the Promenade marketing team, developing and implementing strategic communications to support new service launches, share Promenade news, and drive Promenade brand recognition, thought leadership and customer success. Promenade says its offerings level the playing field for neighborhood businesses, allowing them to reach and retain new customers, grow online revenue and effectively manage both online and in-store orders.

Red Lorry Yellow Lorry has expanded its contract with digital identity company **Imprivata** to include the DACH region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). The agency has developed and implement PR strategies for the company in the US. The DACH campaign, will be managed from RLYL’s Berlin office, will leverage the agency’s healthcare experience to promote Imprivata’s solutions for hospitals, patients, healthcare provider and mission-critical organizations.

COMMENTARY



Tucker Carlson

Sergey speaks the truth for a change... Sergey Lavrov, the font of lies who is Russia's prime minister, has attacked the US media for its alleged anti-Russia bias and for its fronting for the Biden administration. He told Russia's propaganda flagship, RT: "We understood long ago that there is no such thing as an independent western media. Only Fox News is trying to present some sort of alternative point of view."

You got that right, Sergey.

That alternative point of view is one that is totally divorced from reality, which is why Moscow mouthpiece Tucker Carlson and the rest of the Putin bootlickers of Fox are frequently quoted by TASS and RIA Novosti, Russia's state news agencies.

You know things are getting dicey for Tuck when Newsmax host Eric Bolling criticizes him for propping up Russia's propaganda machine.

On April 6, Bolling noted that clips from Carlson's show are used ad nauseam night after night on Russian state TV.

After saying he wasn't here to "slam Tucker," a guy he respects, Bolling said: "But Tucker, you don't want to be associated with this, certainly you don't want to be—part of your legacy to be associated with a war criminal."

Ouch, Comrade.

Tucker's fling with Hungary's authoritarian leader, Victor Orban, apparently wasn't satisfying enough. He decided to go the full totalitarian route with Putin.

Abercrombie & Fitch today is a model corporate citizen focused on diversity and inclusion, but a new Netflix documentary takes viewers back to the turn of the millennium when the retailer was the symbol of "preppy cool."

Abercrombie's overpriced faded jeans, miniskirts and graphic tee shirts with the moose logo promoted the white vision of beauty and style. The company did not sell plus-sizes.

Then-CEO Mike Jeffries famously said: "A lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong."

According to "White Hot: The Rise & Fall of Abercrombie & Fitch," Jeffries was obsessed with youth and hired employees who were white, thin and had Eurocentric features.

A+F was hit with a class action racial discrimination suit in 2003, which alleged the store rejected Black job applicants and relegated minority workers to stockroom positions. The company settled the case for \$50M.

A&F's website now features white, Black and Asian-American models—and a statement from CEO Fran Horowitz:

"Creating an inclusive atmosphere and experience for our customers and associates, across our global organization, is a top priority for our brands."

Netflix's film will be an eye-opener for current A&F staffers.

Examining the COVID-19 business travel wreckage... The American Hotel & Lodging Association expects US hotel business travel revenues will be down 23 percent (\$20B)

this year from pre-pandemic 2019 levels. That follows losses of \$108B for 2020 and 2021.

The Top Three Loser markets are San Francisco (-68.8 percent to \$762M), New York (-55.3 percent to \$2.6B) and Washington (-54.4 percent to \$1.5B).

Looking for rays of sunshine is Chip Roberts, CEO of AHLA, who says dwindling COVID-19 cases and relaxed CDC guidelines provide a sense of optimism about a travel rebound. After two years of virtual work, he believes road warriors are itching to get back into action.

Corporate and financial PR people are gearing up for the annual meeting season, where the battle over purpose is slated to be front and center, according to *The Economist*.

Mark April 28th on the corporate calendar. That's when shareholders at Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vote on proposals from Oxfam to seek to widen access for their COVID-19 vaccines.

The Sustainable Investments Institute reports the number of proposals concerning environmental and social issues rose 15.4 percent compared with 2021, to 576.

This year's round of annual meetings will be the first to be held under new rules from Gary Gensler's Securities and Exchange Commission. Those rules make it easier for activists to operate and tougher for companies to block proposals that deal with "broad societal impact."

The Economist frets that Gensler's rules mean that just about any proposal related to ESG matters will be cleared for a shareholder vote.

It should be an interesting round of meetings.

How low can he possibly go? Donald Trump's golf resort in Doonbeg, Ireland promises a grand time for all guests that take part in its two-hour "Irish Experience" fest of story, song, stew and drinks.

The big event takes place at the Healy House, which has been rebranded as the Shebeen at Trump International Golf Links & Hotel, Doonbeg.

While Trump's promotional piece claims locals recall the Healy House as a "home full of joy and love and often great celebrations," Doonbeg was the site of widespread evictions and mass starvation during the Great Hunger.

A report in the Dec. 29, 1849 *Illustrated London News* describes Doonbeg, which is in County Clare, as a "spot possessing every natural advantage" that was being desecrated by landowners evicting tenants and destroying their cottages.

The article included a sketch of the widowed Judy O'Donnel, who was forced to live with her two children under a bridge in Doonbeg after their home was destroyed by wreckers sent by her corrupt landlord to collect back rent that she already had paid.

Her story is neither part of the golf resort's Irish Experience nor the "enchanted Trump fable" being presented by the Trump Organization.

Team Trump offers a "Disneyfied" version of Irish history that won't upset the high-roller linksters at its golf club.

—Kevin McCauley