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The Inside News of
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FLORIDA COUNTY FLOATS TOURISM PR RFP

The Walton County Tourist Development Council, which promotes Walton County, Florida's tourism economy, has issued an RFP for PR firms that can strengthen and position the area's brand.



TDC seeks an agency that has strong media relationships with the travel/lifestyle press as well as crisis experience to identify key markets in an effort to promote and raise awareness of the Walton area as an upscale destination, with an emphasis on promoting visits during non-peak seasons.

Scope of the work includes targeted pitching to secure earned media; managing and tracking media clippings; reviewing and updating the County's crisis communication plan; and recommending strategies to further improve the brand and economy of Walton.

Terms of the contract will run for one year (beginning in October), with the possibility to renew for two additional one-year terms, at the County's discretion.

Proposals are due by 3 p.m. (CST) Sept. 9. Proposals should be sent to: Office of Central Purchasing; 176 Montgomery Circle; DeFuniak Springs, Florida 32435

Bidders must include an original plus eight copies of the RFP, with the envelope/package marked with the agency's name and address, as well as the words "Public Relations for TDC."

Deadline for questions is 12:00 noon (CST) on August 29. All questions should be forwarded to purchasing agent Glyndol Johnson, johglyndol@co.walton.fl.us.

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

UBER BEGINS MARKETING REBUILD

Google vet Thomas Ranese has joined Uber as VP of global marketing in the aftermath of the company's decision to fire a third (400 people) of its marketing team.



Thomas Ranese

Ranese was Google's VP-global hardware marketing. He had also been global director of Google Brand Studio and head of global marketing strategy and operations.

He was previously chief marketing officer at Empire State Development, the umbrella organization for New York's two main economic development public-benefit corporations.

In his Uber job, he will be responsible for global marketing efforts for Uber's products and businesses. Ranese will also lead the company's brand, creative, research and regional marketing teams.

BGR POWERS VINEYARD WIND FARM

BGR Government Affairs is providing strategic guidance to Vineyard Wind and assisting the New Bedford-based company on federal permitting issues for its proposed 84-turbine wind farm off the Massachusetts coast.

The Dept. of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on Aug. 9 delivered a blow to the project with its decision to delay an environmental impact statement.



The Feds claim they are holding off on the approval due to "input from stakeholders and cooperating agencies" wanting a "more robust review" of the wind farm.

That review could stretch into next year.

Vineyard Wind expressed "surprise and disappointment" with Washington's move and says its targeted 2021 start-up date for the \$2.8B, 800-megawatt facility situated 15 miles south of Martha's Vineyard is in jeopardy.

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren criticized BOEM's "last-minute decision" to delay the permit.

BGR founding partner Haley Barbour, former Republican National Committee chair and Mississippi Governor, leads the Vineyard Wind team.

He's joined by Loren Monroe, who was legislative aide to former New Mexico Republican Senator Pete Domenici, and Dan Murphy, chief of staff for ex-Housing & Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez and a member of Trump's presidential transition team.

UAE HIRES GLOVER PARK TO PROBE US TIES

The United Arab Emirates has enlisted Glover Park Group to research American public attitudes as it rethinks its close ties with the Trump administration.

Once a staunch US ally, the UAE is distancing itself from the White House's bellicose stance toward Iran.

The *Washington Post* reported Aug. 11 that in the aftermath of the US decision to beef up its naval capacity in the Persian Gulf to counter Iran, the UAE sent a delegation to Tehran to discuss maritime security. The UAE also is drawing down its forces in Yemen, where they fought with Saudi Arabia against Iranian-backed forces.



GPG will conduct in-person focus groups and nationwide quantitative research regarding US public opinion.

Representatives of the WPP unit must be available to meet with officials from the UAE embassy on a regular basis, according to its letter of agreement with Shaima Gargash, deputy head of mission.

The \$80K project runs through Sept. 30.

JAY-Z SUITS UP FOR THE NFL

The National Football League has signed rapper Jay-Z to “amplify the league’s social justice efforts” and enhance its live game experiences.



Jay-Z

He will front the NFL’s “inspire Change” initiative launched early this year to help it rebound from the PR blackeye suffered in the aftermath of the Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem fiasco.

The still unsigned Kaepernick filed a grievance against the NFL alleging team owners colluded to keep him out of the game. He settled earlier this year for reportedly less than \$10M.

The NFL’s Inspire Change program works with the Players Coalition and individual players to reduce barriers to opportunity via a focus on education and economic advancement, police & community relations and criminal justice reform.

Jay-Z’s Roc Nation will advise the NFL on the selection of artists for the Super Bowl and “nurture and strengthen community through football and music,” according to the NFL’s statement.

CAYMAN ISLANDS FLOATS CRUISE PORT RFP

The Cayman Islands is floating an RFP to promote its proposed George Town cruise berthing facility and enhanced cargo post.

The Ministry of District Administration, Tourism and Transport wants a PR firm to “provide strategic and tactical marketing communications support for a focused, persuasive, high-intensity public education push” to promote the facility,” which it calls vital to the future prospects of the cruise business.

The ideal partner will “develop an aggressive, slick, out of the box campaign” that can support the project and counter any negative media reports.

The ultimate goal is to sway public opinion and increase support for the facility.

Deadline for proposals is Aug. 29.

The RFP is available on the [government’s portal](#).

PEARSON ALUM CELLINI ENROLLS AT ASA

Annabel Cellini, who spent 15 years at educational publishing giant Pearson, has joined American Student Assistance in Boston as chief strategy officer.

She exited Pearson as senior VP-strategy & marketing for North America, handling strategy, research, content, creative and digital functions for the K-12, higher education and professional markets.



Annabel Cellini

ASA is a 60-year-old nonprofit that works with students to help them understand educational and career options, along with the available loans and financial assistance packages.

As CSO, Cellini will work with ASA CEO Jean Eddy to execute a plan to empower students in grades 6-12 to find and pursue their educational goals.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Zeno Group has been named agency of record in the Americas for **Zebra Technologies Corporation**, a company that manufactures and sells marking, tracking and computer printing technologies. The company is also extending its four-year engagement with **Archetype**, which will be AOR in Europe, as well in the APAC and EMEA regions. The agencies will collaborate with Zebra on driving its integrated global campaign strategy to promote the company’s solutions, leveraging digital components including Zebra’s Your Edge blog.

Issa PR has been appointed to launch luxury cannabis company **Herbés**. Issa PR will help to drive US media relations for the company, as well as provide strategy for seeding, influencer engagement and guerilla marketing. Founded in Orange County, CA by former professional basketball player and longtime grower Jonas Lalehzadeh, Herbés manufactures a line of cannabis products that include hand-rolled cannagars (a cigar-type cannabis product). Herbés will have limited availability at select licensed dispensaries and launches this month with the release of the Herbés Trophy cannagar.



William Mills Agency has been selected to provide public relations services for technology firm **KBS Analytics**. WMA will help the company build momentum for and launch KlariVis, an interactive, cloud-based data analytics platform that streamlines data in a clear and easy to understand way. It compiles, aggregates and showcases previously siloed and disparate data in one place to allow for more timely strategic and profitable business decisions. Headquartered in Roanoke, Va., KBS Analytics was founded by Kim Snyder, CEO and founder of KBS Results, a highly specialized management consulting firm focused on the financial services industry.

Calysto Communications has been selected by **Everstream**, which provides fiber-based Ethernet, internet and data center solutions to businesses throughout the Midwest, to build brand awareness in support of the company’s \$300 million expansion into 12 new markets. Calysto, which focuses solely on the IoT, mobile, wireless and telecom markets, will work to communicate why Everstream is the business fiber network of choice. “We believe Calysto’s integrated marketing capabilities, deep industry knowledge and influential connections align best with our strategic initiatives,” said Everstream president and CEO Brett Lindsey.

5W Public Relations has been named agency of record for **Webull Financial LLC**, an independent, self-directed broker dealer focused on zero commission trading and an in-depth market data platform. 5W will work to raise awareness of the brand. Webull offers real-time data, aggregated content, and extended hours for trading.



Webull works to provide its news, real-time market data, analysis tools and trading commissions for no charge. It says its mission is to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to control their own financial future.

THE POWER OF FINANCIAL CONTENT

Today's financial firms increasingly need ways to stay on the minds of potential and existing clients. With the advertising noise now louder than ever—atop a heavy cost—content marketing offers one of the best options for financial firms looking to make a splash.



Alex Stanton

However, many financial services firms get tripped up at the get-go, not sure where to start or how to create an effective program. Having worked with many of these firms as they've navigated the ups and downs of a changing marketing landscape,

there are a few considerations the most successful have in common.

Think broadly

Content marketing is a wide arena of communications that transcends any one medium. White papers, brochures and social media posts are often the first things that come to mind, but there are also proprietary surveys, infographics, thought leadership videos, podcasts, email marketing campaigns, digital slideshows, interactive data graphs and much more. The only thing that makes a content program “standard” in financial services is its focus on building brand affinity and reputation rather than direct sales.

It's important to be clear about the role content marketing can play. Much like a media relations program, content marketing is a mid-funnel communication that helps you stay top-of-mind among those who already know you and gives your leads team a natural, meaningful way to stay front of mind until the right prospect makes a buying decision.

Being clear and realistic about program goals can be a challenge, especially if your company, like many financial services firms, is new to content marketing. In these situations, it often helps to have an outside voice. Does your HR team need support with recruitment? A content marketing program can help attract talent by engaging existing employees as brand ambassadors. Struggling with the program direction or finding the time to implement your plan? An agency partner can be critical in overcoming these roadblocks.

Capture your knowledge

Once you've defined success, you must figure out what you're going to say. Many firms perceive this as a roadblock, but almost all companies are already saying quite a bit; it's just not being captured and redeployed.

Do an audit of content you already have. Does your company have a media relations program? You can use both the published stories and the interview discussion to pull out tidbits of content. Does your company put on an annual conference? Those slides are filled with content gold that can be repurposed all year.

There are four key areas where nearly every financial services firm is already producing content:

Company and executives. Launching a new product, hitting a goal milestone, attending an industry con-

ference—many things your company does in normal course—can be compelling content if framed within your wider market perspective.

News and media. Insights from media stories about your company and independent commentary can be culled and repurposed for months—sometimes years—within a content marketing program. You can also use industry news in the same way. Is there a story that you think would be of interest? Share it along with a company executive's take on the topic.

Customers and partners. You work hard to give your clients your best work, and to win more of it, you need to highlight what you've done. Are there advice memos or reports you've sent to a client that you can revise to be applicable to a wider audience? Can you showcase your expertise across different products like case studies, podcasts, and e-books?

Employees. Existing staff are your best assets in increasing recruitment and enhancing retention. However, decision influencers and potential clients will also be interested in who your team members are as people. Discussing career journeys, highlighting volunteer programs they do with and without the company, and finding ways to elevate their customer successes are all effective ways to bring this to life.

Repurposing existing commentary is one of the reasons content marketing is so cost-efficient: you aren't reinventing the wheel.

Start small

In addition to its flexibility and efficiency, content marketing is inherently scalable, making it ideal for firms—and their compliance departments—who are just dipping their toes into the waters of proactive communications.

One of our clients began by simply wanting to get more out of an annual customer conference on which they spend a lot of time and money. We used the conference presentations to create well-styled white papers and concise videos that were distributed to a select prospect list, and then further reworked into a series of leave-behinds used throughout the year. The reach of that original presentation was increased 100 times at a fraction of the initial cost of creation.

Starting small is key: you'll want to measure how an initial program performs and iterate based on the lessons learned from that campaign. As you grow the program, you may need to tap partners like a communications agency to drive program execution, or a design firm to enhance visuals and further the program's success.

In my experience, many firms that have initially been concerned about committing to a content marketing effort have quickly gotten ROI from this cost-efficient, controllable communication. In 2020, we'll see even more financial services firms expanding their content programs, taking advantage of their efficiency, scalability and reputation-enhancing benefits.

Alex Stanton is CEO of Stanton, a communications firm with offices in New York and California. He can be reached at astanton@stantonprm.com.

HUAWEI DIALS UP FEDERAL ADVOCATES INC.

Huawei, the world's largest telecommunications gear maker and suspected spying tool of the Chinese government, has hired Federal Advocates Inc., a top Republican firm, for DC representation. The Commerce Dept. in May slapped sanctions on Huawei that bar it from purchasing American telecom components.



Michael Esposito leads the push for Huawei. His mission is to handle telecommunications issues before the Trump administration. He serves on Republican National Committee chairman's advisory board, where he advises chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, and serves on the Trump Victory Finance Committee.

The *Wall Street Journal* published a blockbuster on Aug. 14, reporting that Huawei equipment, which is dominant in Africa, is used by African leaders to spy on political opponents.

FAI founder/CEO Michael Esposito leads the push for Huawei. His mission is to handle telecommunications issues before the Trump administration. He serves on Republican National Committee chairman's advisory board, where he advises chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, and serves on the Trump Victory Finance Committee.

TUSCAN WINE INVITES PR PITCHES

The Consorzio del Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, the coalition that manages marketing and communication activities promoting winemakers in the Tuscan town of Montepulciano, is calling on PR firms to provide input as it seeks to raise awareness and prominence of its wines in the U.S. market and among the U.S. food/beverage press.

The Consorzio has invited U.S. PR agencies to bid on a three-year PR and B2B promotion program.

Scope of that project would include: developing a communications plan and tactical approach to identifying target critics, journalists, influencers, sommeliers and bloggers, etc.; identifying and collaborating with influencers and critics to organize visits to Montepulciano and tastings; evaluating the PR program's impact on a half-yearly basis for the three-year duration of the campaign.

Contact is Max de Zarobe, uscom@consorziovinonobile.it.

[Download the Request for Tender document \(PDF\).](#)

OBAMA ALUM TAKES NYS FINANCIAL POST

Nate Turnbull, who worked in the Obama White House, has been appointed executive deputy for external affairs and strategy for The New York State Department of Financial Services. Turnbill will lead the department's team of public policy and communications professionals.

Turnbull comes to DFS from nonprofit organization management firm CONNECT, where he served as VP of public policy.



Nate Turnbull was special assistant to the president during the Obama administration, leading the team that collaborated with the National Economic Council, the Council of Economic Advisers, and Domestic Policy Council to appoint and manage individuals with oversight over the nation's economic policy and financial security. Turnbull also served as White House Liaison at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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VIACOM AND CBS TO REUNITE

CBS and Viacom are reuniting after 13 years of operating as separate companies under the umbrella of Sumner Redstone's National Amusements, the companies announced on Aug. 13.

Shari Redstone, who is currently vice chair of both Viacom and CBS, will become chair of the combined company, which will operate as ViacomCBS. Current Viacom chief executive Bob Bakish will be the company's CEO, and CBS acting chief Joe Ianniello will remain as chairman and CEO of the CBS-branded assets.

While ViacomCBS aims to position itself as a force that can do battle with such media behemoths as AT&T, Disney, Netflix and Comcast, it will still be considerably smaller than any of those companies.

However, Viacom would boast such strengths as a library of about 140,000 episodes of premium TV and 3,600 film titles. It would also be one of the top spenders on content, with Viacom and CBS having spent \$13 billion on content in the last year.

The deal, which is expected to go through with little regulatory difficulty, is expected to close by the 2019 calendar year-end.



Shari Redstone

MEDIA MANEUVERS

The *Financial Times* has picked up a minority stake in **Business of Fashion**, a media company with a website, daily newsletter and print magazine that cover the fashion industry. The FT is taking the lead in the company's Series B funding round, alongside such current partners as Index Ventures and Felix Capital. Founded in 2007 by former McKinsey consultant Imran Amed, BoF currently has an international audience of about five million for its online, print and events business, with 35,000 paying members. While FT Strategies, the FT's consulting division, will provide BoF with support and tech expertise, BoF and the FT will be editorially independent.

Blogging site **Tumblr**, which was picked up by Yahoo for \$1.1 billion in 2013, has been sold by Verizon (which acquired Yahoo in 2017) to **Automattic**, the owner of online-publishing platform Wordpress.com, for a price that several sources put at just \$3 million. Automattic will take on Tumblr's 200 employees. Automattic chief executive Matt Mullenweg said that he plans to maintain the ban on adult content that was put in place at Tumblr last year.

High Times is partnering with international awards competition Clio to launch **Clio Cannabis**. The new awards will recognize individuals and companies involved in marketing and advertising cannabis products. Submissions in the following categories will be accepted starting Aug. 26: advocacy, brand design, digital/mobile, film/video, partnerships & collaborations, print & out of home, product design, social media and social good. Clio currently runs awards programs centering on the advertising, sports, fashion, music, entertainment and health industries.

IPR HONORS WEBER'S POLANSKY

Weber Shandwick executive chairman Andy Polansky will receive the 2019 IPR Alexander Hamilton Medal for Lifetime Achievement at the IPR Annual Distinguished Lecture & Awards Dinner on Nov. 19 at New York City's Roosevelt Hotel.



Andy Polansky

The IPR presents the award, which is named in honor of the strategies employed by Hamilton to gain support for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, to recognize individuals who have made major contributions to the practice of public relations. Harold Burson, Al Golin and Besty Plank are among the past recipients.

Gail Heimann, president and CEO of Weber Shandwick, said Polansky's leadership "has demonstrated, beyond doubt, that relentlessly focusing on people is what matters most."

For more information on the event, or to purchase tickets, [click here](#).

CAMPARI TAPS BALLARD FOR TARIFF DUTY

Italy's Campari America unit has hired Trump-connected Ballard Partners to handle trade and tariff matters.

The Milan-based company is the world's No. 6 spirits producer and owner of the Wild Turkey Distillery in Lawrenceburg, KY.

The EU has slapped a tariff on US whiskey imports following president Trump's decision to impose tariffs on European steel and aluminum exports to the US. A Campari spokesperson says since Wild Turkey Straight Kentucky Bourbon "is in its seeding phase in Europe, the duties on bourbon will not affect our growth plans for the brand nor the overall performance of the company."

Brian Ballard, who was Trump's top campaign fundraiser in Florida, and Syl Lukis, manager of Ballard's DC office, handle the business for Campari America, which is based in New York.

GOP'S MADDEN SHIFTS TO ARNOLD VENTURES

Kevin Madden, a top Republican communications operative, has joined Arnold Ventures philanthropy as executive VP-advocacy.

The former national spokesperson for Mitt Romney's 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns will help integrate the PR/communications strategies of AV with its policy and research capabilities.



Kevin Madden

He will also position the Houston-based organization, which was founded by Texas billionaire & former Enron trader John Arnold and his wife Laura, as a leader in public policy debates surrounding healthcare, education, criminal justice and government reform at the federal/state/local levels.

Between Romney's presidential quests, Madden was managing director at the Democratic-leaning Glover Park Group.

He joins AV from the GOP-oriented Hamilton Place Strategies, where he was a partner.

NEWS OF FIRMS

Wunderlich Kaplan Communications has opened an office in Miami. The office will be led by WKC chief executive officer Gwen Wunderlich and new hire Jordan Smith. The new office's client roster includes celebrity chef Chef Danie, World Famous House of Mac and life coach Stephanie Catalano of Mindful Living Now. WKC is also opening a Boston office, in the city's Back Bay neighborhood, on Sept. 1. An office in Dubai was launched in June.

Edelman has formed a partnership aimed at helping companies use behavioral science to improve business performance. The partnership includes Harvard Business School researchers and Jason Hreha, former head of Behavioral Science for Walmart. It will be led by Felicia Joy, a senior vice president in Edelman's advisory services practice as well as a Harvard-trained behavioral scientist. Employing randomized controlled trials and other methods, the partnership will focus on enabling clients to measurably prototype new programs.



Orange Orchard, which focuses on environmentally conscious businesses and nonprofits, has joined IPREX. The agency is a division of Tennessee-based Ripley PR, a fellow partner of the IPREX Global Communication Platform. Orange Orchard works with environmentally conscious organizations in the plant-based and vegan food and beverage and consumer goods industries, as well as companies in green construction, energy, green tech.

talkTECH co-founder and CEO Kristen Grossi and FLIGHT PR founder Alysha Light have teamed up to launch **Joint PR**, which works with emerging and established cannabis brands. The aim of the agency, according to Light, is "to help bring legitimacy to the cannabis space and make it mainstream." The range of services offered by Joint PR include media & influencer relations, communications & messaging strategy, company/product launches, acquisitions, executive media training, thought leadership campaigns and event publicity. Current agency clients include lifestyle media startup Prøhbt; investment holding company Archytas Ventures; and order-ahead and loyalty rewards app Greenlight.

BCW, along with entertainment firm **BWR** (a member of BCW Group), are introducing **BCW Entertainment**, a suite of entertainment offerings that will employ pop culture to build brands. BCW Entertainment will be led by Eric Green, who has helmed BWR's entertainment division and is being promoted to president of BWR, effective immediately. Green will partner with Sunny Jenkins, previously executive vice president at HL Group, who recently joined BWR in the newly created role of chief growth officer. BCW Entertainment will be led out of Los Angeles and supported by a global team. The firm represents television and digital networks, content creators, red-carpet events and more than 150 personalities across film, TV and music.



Eric Green

A BLUEPRINT FOR CORPORATE REPUTATION

Warren Buffett famously said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.” Who am I to disagree with Mr. Buffett? According to the Reputation Institute, intangible value—including corporate reputation—makes up 81 percent of market value. This means a one-point increase in reputation yields a 2.6 percent increase in market cap, which translates into an average of \$1 billion.

However, corporate and financial communicators know that if a company is going to market now, it doesn’t have 20 years to build its reputation. With 24/7 media, globally connected social networks and online marketplaces, investors, influencers, customers and employees can alter the perception of a corporate brand in the blink of an eye.



Ryan Barr

As corporate reputation impacts valuation, communicators must close the gap between the reality of a company’s current operational status and the perceptions of key external stakeholders. And, the vast array of external influences can interfere with a company’s ability to control its narrative. Given this, it’s more important than ever for a company to use all the tools at its disposal. Where to begin?

It starts with storytelling. Financial and corporate communicators need to build compelling narratives rooted in data that show an obtainable goal, all to be measured by a roadmap that tracks a company’s progress. For all companies, financials are the obvious—and sometimes most critical—gauge of success. It’s fairly straightforward: tell your stakeholders what you’re going to do: increase sales, control expenses and grow the bottom line; execute your plan; and then report back. Unfortunately, financials are only one metric used to measure a company’s success and not all companies are at the same moment in their lifecycle.

A narrative must go beyond the numbers. Stakeholders must understand the vision of the company; what are you trying to achieve beyond growth. Start-ups and early-stage companies too often default to, “We’re a disruptor in an industry that has been stagnant for too long.” Great, but what does that truly mean? Disruption has become a cliché. What are you really doing as a company? Solving the last mile of affordable and efficient transportation; bringing life-saving preventative medicine to those most in need; providing connectivity and speed to rural populations? All of these are disruptive and also showcase achievable goals. Build a story that people can relate to, follow and rally behind.

Now that you have your story and you know what your audience wants to hear, **you need to reach them where they are.** Not every stakeholder is reading the same publication, visiting the same websites or even using the same social media channels. Your audience is as unique as you are. You need to understand how they consume information. Whether it’s a commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* or a thought leadership piece in *The Atlantic* or a listicle on BuzzFeed, make sure you’re

telling a consistent story that is relevant to the outlet’s specific audience. Ensure that you employ this approach through all your communications channels. While the appeal of a “third-party” endorsement in earned media remains the holy grail for many, it’s not the only means of connecting and influencing key audiences.

Developing original content provides an opportunity to control the narrative, but it will also allow you to showcase your corporate DNA. As mentioned, companies aren’t solely evaluated by financials alone because corporate culture, management credibility and even likability are a part of intangible value. Original content highlighting customer success stories, community involvement and corporate evolution can engage stakeholders in ways companies never dreamed possible 20 years ago. Go ahead, show off your creativity and bring your story to life. Make sure you stay true to your brand and remain relevant in the eyes of your key audience.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, **the role of communications isn’t solely the responsibility of the CEO, executive team or communications professionals.** I’m not suggesting you move the responsibility from the top of the organization. That would be ridiculous! I am, however, suggesting that there needs to be a top-down and bottom-up strategy.

The CEO and executive team remain the primary source of information, consistently conveying the corporate narrative during every interaction, including media interviews, conferences, investor meetings, employee townhalls and customer engagement.

Additionally, employees from all levels must be involved in the external communications approach; they’re a company’s most valuable asset. When they believe in a company’s vision, mission and purpose, they’ll be brand ambassadors and help close the gap between inaccurate external perceptions and internal realities. It’s important to provide employees with the training and tools that adequately equip them to advocate for a brand. They’re on the frontlines, speaking with customers, partners and colleagues daily. If they’re not properly trained, they can inadvertently be the cause of the spread of disinformation.

Additionally, companies must create social media guardrails and provide the tools for online employee advocacy programs that will afford their brand the opportunity to dramatically increase their reach. Not only is their reach broader and highly relevant, the cost to implement employee advocacy programs is a fraction of advertising. There’s no reason for your number-one asset to be sidelined. Get them in the game.

Closing the gap that exists between perception and reality is critical to preserving corporate reputation and maximizing shareholder value. Remember to build a narrative rooted in data and designed with purpose; understand your audiences to ensure relevance and reach them where they are; and deploy a holistic communications approach that empowers employees to be advocates and stand aligned with executives. Follow this blueprint and you won’t need 20 years to build your reputation.

Ryan Barr is Managing Partner at Finn Partners and leader of its global financial services practice.

COMMENTARY

The Business Roundtable gave a major boost to public relations with its Aug. 19 pronouncement that there's more to corporate life than fattening the wallets of shareholders. The move cheered the hearts of do-gooders everywhere and PR people involved in the noble work of corporate social responsibility.



Jamie Dimon

The group's revised "statement of purpose" says companies exist to benefit customers, employees, suppliers, communities, not just stockholders.

Signed by 181 CEOs, the revamped code "outlines a modern standard for corporate responsibility" according to BR's statement.

"Americans deserve an economy that allows each person to succeed through hard work and creativity and to lead a life of meaning and dignity," opens the statement from the group, which represents companies with more than \$7T in annual revenues. "We believe the free-market system is the best means of generating good jobs, a strong and sustainable economy, innovation, a health environment and economic opportunity for all."

Since 1977, each version of BR's statement of purpose has "endorsed principles of shareholder primacy—that corporations exist to serve shareholders."

Jamie Dimon, BR chairman and JPMorgan Chase chief, said the "modernized principles reflect the business community's unwavering commitment to continue to push for an economy that serves all Americans."

Corporate trade groups and nonprofits are spending more in Washington for advocacy and strategic communications than for lobbying, according to a study by MapLight, the Berkeley-based watchdog.

Studying the tax returns of 100 trade organizations and nonprofits, MapLight identified \$535M spent for lobbying in 2017 and \$675M for unregulated efforts to influence public policy. That unregulated spending was listed as "consulting," "advocacy," "government affairs," "coalitions," "contributions," "consortiums," "special projects" "dues," "memberships," "subscriptions," "programs" and "advocacy" expenses.

Those outlays allow business interests to exploit loopholes in lobbying rules that fail to cover staples of modern influence campaigns, such as strategic consulting, broadcast advertising, media relations, social media posts, polling and financing of astroturf campaigns, according to MapLight, which is dedicated to promoting "a more responsive, accountable, and representative democracy."

According to IRS rules, companies can give cash to trade groups to run campaigns on their behalf.

MapLight cites the \$100M-plus push by the US Chamber of Commerce on behalf of private health insur-

ers against ObamaCare as the most successful example of secretive trade group spending,

Though ObamaCare became law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act did not include a "public option," which was fiercely opposed by private insurers.

MapLight calls advocacy spending "the darkest money in Washington."

Stephanie Grisham, White House press secretary since July 1, emerged from the shadows on the evening of Aug. 14 to tell the DC press corps that it can forget about WH press briefings.

Appearing on Sinclair Broadcasting Group, which wants to give Fox News a run for its money as the go-to network for conservatives, Grisham basically talked herself out of her job. Donald Trump is "his press spokesperson," she said.

That begs the question: What does Grisham do?

"I'm getting up to speed on policy," she told Sinclair's Eric Bolling. "There's a lot of work done behind the scenes. It's not all about a press briefing."

But some of it should be.

Grisham called Trump "the most accessible president in modern history." She apparently feels reporters should thank their lucky stars for the opportunity for "press gaggles" with Trump, where "no question goes unanswered."

That's bunk.

Grisham deserves a special Pinocchio Award from the *Washington Post* fact-checkers for her "no question goes unanswered" at gaggles whooper.

The Sinclair interview was Grisham's first since becoming White House press secretary and communications director. Her absence from the media scene makes one pine for the days when Sarah Huckabee Sanders presided over the press corps and Anthony Scaramucci/Hope Hicks called the shots as communications directors.

At the very least, they were visible.

Since Grisham doesn't have to prepare and conduct press briefings, she has some free time on her hands.

There's a great, albeit seasonal, opportunity for Grisham, who was Melania Trump's press secretary before taking her vaguely defined job working for The Donald.

The First Lady is looking for volunteers to decorate the White House for the upcoming Christmas season. Volunteers are also needed to serve as holiday open house greeters. The White House on Aug. 12 posted an application form on its website.

Go for it, Stephanie. Time though is running short. Applications are due Aug. 27.

If you take the decorator job, please do the country a favor. Persuade Melania to ditch the red Christmas trees that had many of last year's White House visitors thinking they were on the set of "The Handmaid's Tale."

—Kevin McCauley