



Kevin McCauley  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's Newsletter

The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

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## HONG KONG WANTS US TRAVEL PR FIRM

Hong Kong Tourism Board is looking to hire a PR firm to revive the city's reeling tourism sector that has been rocked by months of pro-democracy protests.



The number of visitors to Hong Kong plunged 56 percent to 2.65M in November, the biggest decline since the SARS outbreak in 2003.

The HKTB wants a firm to develop and execute strategic PR and social marketing campaigns in the US.

The desired partner will have extensive destination marketing expertise with at least \$2M in US billings and verifiable separate PR and social marketing departments.

A full-service office in greater Los Angeles is a must, while a presence in New York is a "bonus."

Firms that want to receive the HKTB PR program brief and tender documents, must fax a confirmed letter of interest on company letterhead with contact details to Katy Yoh, finance & administration manager at 323/938-4583 by Dec. 30.

Following receipt of the letter of interest, agencies will be required to submit credentials and capabilities deck with relevant case studies needed to demonstrate PR and social marketing expertise by Jan. 8.

The HKTB will evaluate submissions and mail/email tender documents to qualified firms.

## FTI LURES WEBER SHANDWICK'S DIGITAL GURU

FTI Consulting has recruited Spencer Ante, who was Weber Shandwick's digital content and editorial director, as managing director in New York.

At the Interpublic unit, Ante served as content lead for The X Practice in North America in charge of strategy, creation, distribution and delivery of client programs.



Spencer Ante

He provided strategic input on messaging, corporate positioning, product introductions, thought leadership, business transformation, issues management and media relations.

Ante also served as editorial director at Edelman, senior writer at the *Wall Street Journal* and associate director for a 10-year stretch at *BusinessWeek*.

As part of FTI's strategic communications unit's digital & insights practice, Ante reports to Brent McGoldrick, who joined the firm a year ago from Deep Root Analytics.

***Happy Holidays to our readers! This is the last issue of the year. The next issue of the Newsletter will appear on Jan. 6, but follow breaking news on [odwyerpr.com](http://odwyerpr.com).***

## FINN TOPS OBSERVER'S 'POWER LIST'

Peter Finn's Finn Partners tops the Observer's "power list" that was released Dec. 17.

BerlinRosen, which was ranked No. 1 last year, slips to No. 2, while Alison Brod Marketing & Communications catapults from No. 36 to the third spot.

The Observer cited Finn Partners, which was No. 3 last year, for its "stratospheric growth" in the financial services, health and digital sectors combined with acquisitions in Hong Kong, London, Shanghai, Boston and New York.



Peter Finn

The "unstoppable" BerlinRosen grew in headcount (142 to 182), NYC office space and service offerings during 2019.

Alison Brod was the driving force behind the launch of Popeye's chicken sandwich, which generated more than 10B impressions on social media.

Rounding out the Observer's Top Ten list are 42 West, Kekst CNC, Global Strategy Group, BCW, Sunshine Sachs, M18 and Rogers & Cowan/PMK.

## HUNTSWORTH EYES RETURN TO PR GROWTH

Huntsworth reported that its PR unit for the first time in several years will achieve full-year growth in 2019. The unit is projected to chart a two percent advance.

"Constellation Communications, which houses the non-health facing PR agencies, returned to growth led by Grayling in Europe and Citigate Dewe Rogerson, especially in Asia," Huntsworth CEO Paul Taaffe told O'Dwyer's.

Grayling's performance in the U.S. was "fairly stable."

Taaffe said the Evoke Kyne healthcare unit "is on an enormous tear all over the world but especially in the US."

The British holding company anticipates like-for-like revenue growth of three percent for 2019.

The firm's medical group will spark overall performance as it is projected to rise by eight percent for the full year, according to Huntsworth's 11-month trading update.



Paul Taaffe

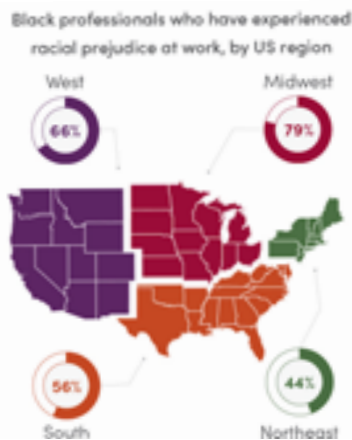
## **BLACK PROFESSIONALS STILL FACE BIAS**

Nearly one in five black professionals feel that someone of their race/ethnicity would never achieve a top job at their companies, according to a study conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation.

“Being Black in Corporate America: An Intersectional Exploration” takes a look at the prejudices that are still commonly found in many companies and points out possible solutions to the problem.

The study found that black professionals were more likely than other groups to face racial prejudice at work. While 48 percent of Latinx professionals and 38 percent of Asians said they had experienced racial prejudice at work, that number is 58 percent for black professionals.

The Midwest registered as the worst area of the country in this regard, with 79 percent of its black professionals saying they had experienced racial prejudice in the workplace. The West followed with 66 percent, the South with 56 percent and the Northeast doing the best at 44 percent.



professionals saying they had experienced racial prejudice in the workplace.

The West followed with 66 percent, the South with 56 percent and the Northeast doing the best at 44 percent.

Not surprisingly, black employees are far more likely than their white colleagues to see the racial barriers that still exist in their companies. Almost two-thirds (65

percent) of black professionals said black employees have to work harder to advance, while only 16 percent of white employees agreed.

Access to company leadership was also a problem. While 44 percent of white full-time employees said they have access to senior leaders at work, only 31 percent of full-time black employees said they had similar access.

Employees across the board say diversity and inclusion efforts are coming up short. Only 34 percent of black professionals said their company has effective D&I efforts, and the numbers are little better for Latinx (39 percent), Asian (40 percent) or white professionals (41 percent).

In addition, black full-time professionals think that D&I efforts are disproportionately directed at benefiting white women. Almost three in ten black professionals surveyed (29 percent) said that white women are the primary beneficiaries of D&I efforts at their companies.

Because of these factors, there is a higher amount of dissatisfaction among black professionals. More than one in three (35 percent) of them said they intend to leave their current company within two years.

However, some strategies prove somewhat successful at increasing the level of job satisfaction among black professionals. Black women who are satisfied with their advancement and intend to remain at their companies cite clear expectations for inclusive behavior as key. For black men, offering in-person bias awareness training was seen as being helpful.

The CTI study was conducted in June 2019, polling 3,736 participants.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**JeffreyGroup** has been selected as the Brazil PR agency of record for **Walt Disney World Resort**. The agency’s work will include strategic communications planning, media relations familiarization trips, influencer and celebrity engagement, and promotions and broadcast integrations. In addition to wholly-owned offices in New York, Miami, Mexico City, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Buenos Aires, Jeffrey Group’s pan-regional team and network of independent local service partner agencies operate across Latin America and the Caribbean.



**Affect**, which specializes in technology, healthcare and professional services, has been selected to lead the North American public relations efforts for **Modern Systems**, a provider of application modernization services. Affect will work with the company on media relations, executive thought leadership and social media, as well as helping to highlight client successes and partner relationships. Its campaign will support the rebrand of Modern Systems to Advanced, which recently acquired the company.

**DRS and Associates** has been named agency of record across multiple marketing service disciplines by **Kalco Lighting** and **Allegrì Crystal by Kalco**. The agency’s services for both companies will include brand marketing, messaging and communication, narrative strategy review, public relations, social media marketing, direct digital marketing trade engagement, advertising and content marketing.

**Bastion Elevate** is partnering with **Almost Naked Swim** to help raise visibility and awareness of the brand among consumers as it prepares for a Spring 2020 launch. The agency will also provide PR, social media advertising and creative for the company. Almost Naked Swim co-founder Kylie Williams said that Bastion Elevate has “a clear understanding of what we need for launch.”

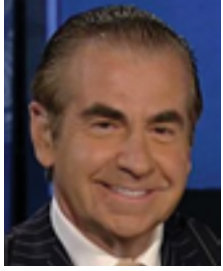
**5W Public Relations** has been appointed PR agency of record for **Airgraft**, which designs, develops, and sells vaporization hardware. 5W will work with the company to reshape consumer attitudes about responsible vaping. Founded in 2018, Airgraft aims to create a vaporizing technology that focuses on control and transparency.



**The Dalton Agency** has been named agency-of-record for **Blackline Safety Corp.**, a company specializing in gas detection and connected safety. The Jacksonville, FL shop will work with Blackline Safety to elevate its brand, expand awareness of its products and services and educate target audiences about the company’s ability to deliver connected employee safety solutions. The agency will also manage a program that includes media relations, digital advertising, creative development and execution, social media content creation and community management, and internal communications.

## **EXXON WINS. TRUTH PREVAILS**

If you, like most of your fellow compatriots, have been consumed lately by the gripping impeachment drama in Washington (yawn), or the scurrilous accusation that the New England Patriots would actually cheat to win (groan), or the news that back-broken Harvey Weinstein has bribed his way out of prison (phew)... then you probably weren't paying attention a few weeks ago when a significant, long-awaited court case was decided in New York City.



**Fraser P. Seitel**

If so, you're to be forgiven, because the *New York Times* also buried the court decision—New York State v. Exxon Mobil—even though that paper had engaged in a five-year, front-page crusade to, well, bury the oil company for its alleged role in perpetuating global warming.

In a day marked by “alternative facts” and “false assertions” and “Pinocchio fact checks” and “fake news,” the fact that dreaded Exxon prevailed despite a tidal wave of relentless negative publicity should be welcome news to any communicator who believes in the power of truth over distortion, bullying and hysteria.

The Times' anti-Exxon march began in 2015, when it ran a glowing profile—how many times has that happened? —of Harvard Professor Naomi Oreskes, a prominent climate change advocate and virulent Exxon enemy (although she demurely denies it).

The Times gushed over Prof. Oreskes' book, “Merchants of Doubt,” which questioned the motives and morals of scientists, such as those at Exxon who played down the dangers of climate change.

Later that year, the Times announced that New York's Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, drawing liberally from Prof. Oreskes' research, had subpoenaed Exxon to investigate whether the company lied to the public and investors about the risks of climate change.

Over the next five years, the Times awarded Prof. Oreskes ample space to publish “research studies” that challenged Exxon's knowledge of climate change as well as op-ed articles elaborating why her research was right.

The Times next appointed a full-time climate change reporter, a decent chap named John Schwartz, to focus on Exxon as the ringleader of climate change deniers.

It was Schwartz's task to remind readers periodically of Exxon's alleged deceit, finally announcing on Page One in 2018 that New York State had filed suit against Exxon for defrauding shareholders about the risks of climate change.

Triumphantly, in October 2019, Mr. Schwartz and the Times informed its readers—on the front page—that at long last, “New York Sues Exxon Mobil, Saying it Deceived Shareholders on Climate Change.”

During the trial's three months, the Times remained in attack mode, periodically allowing Exxon enemies to hyperventilate on the op-ed page, hoping against hope to influence the judge to find the company guilty.

Typical of the op-ed opprobrium was a hysterical rant by a notorious Exxon hater halfway through the trial that called out the company and its industry for knowing

full well that they were the primary culprits for a “planet headed toward a climate catastrophe.”

The writer concluded by applying a bit of what might graciously be characterized as “good-natured pressure” on the judge in the case by calling him out by name and beseeching him to “determine whether Exxon's misrepresentations violated New York securities law.”

In the end, of course, as the Times reported in a short piece hidden inside the paper that you likely missed, the judge found in favor of Exxon. Despite the hysterical rantings of its critics, aided and abetted over the years by the New York Times, the judge concluded that the state “failed to establish by a preponderance of the evidence” that Exxon had done anything wrong.

After the verdict, the company commented that the case affirmed its position from the beginning that it had reported accurately over the years as the science on climate change became more certain and that the whole orchestrated campaign against it was, therefore, baseless.

New York AG Letitia James, on the other hand, wasn't buying the Exxon blather. “For the first time in history,” she crowed, “Exxon Mobil was compelled to answer publicly for their internal decisions that misled investors.”

And all it cost to find out that the rabble rousers were wrong and the “bad guys” were telling the truth were several million dollars out of taxpayer pockets. Such a deal.

*Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for 40 years. He is author of the Pearson text “The Practice of Public Relations,” now in its 13th edition, and co-author of “Rethinking Reputation” and “Idea Wise.” He may be reached directly at [yusake@aol.com](mailto:yusake@aol.com).*

## **COCA-COLA CALLS ARROYO CMO**

Manuel “Manolo” Arroyo, group president of the Coca-Cola Company's Asia Pacific region, has been promoted to the position of global chief marketing officer.

Arroyo assumes the top marketing role on Jan. 1.

Arroyo was named group president of Coca-Cola's Asia Pacific group last year. He previously led the company's Mexico business. He has also served as president of Coca-Cola's South East and West Asia business unit and general manager of Coca-Cola Iberia franchise unit.

Arroyo started his Coca-Cola career in 1995 in Madrid and later became global brand manager for its Bottled Water & Fresca/Quatro brands in Atlanta.



**Manuel**

**“Manolo” Arroyo**

Arroyo's appointment comes as the soft drink giant experiences a broader restructuring of its executive leadership and operations. Coca-Cola's global marketing duties had previously been handled by chief growth officer Francisco Crespo, who is retiring after three decades with the company.

With Arroyo's promotion, the soft drink giant has reinstated the global CMO role after nixing the title in early 2017. Arroyo will continue to serve as president of Coca-Cola's Asia Pacific group.



## **BUCKEYE, AZ ANNOUNCES RFQ**

City of Buckeye, AZ is soliciting responses from qualified agencies that can develop a marketing, branding and advertising implementation plan to be used in a by the city's Community Services Department.

The Maricopa County city, which sits on the westernmost edge of the Phoenix metropolitan area, is now the fastest growing city in the United States, according to 2019 U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

The City of Buckeye has issued a Request for Qualification for agencies that can create a clear and uni-



formed marketing plan representing the CSD's various divisions, programs and events in an effort to communicate the city's culture and increase brand awareness and trust as well

as drive sponsorships, program registration, event attendance, facility reservations and net revenue.

Statements of qualifications are due by 1:00 pm (MT) on January 8, 2020 and should be sent to:

City of Buckeye  
530 East Monroe Avenue  
Buckeye, AZ 85326  
Attn: Tammy Voge

Agencies responding to the RFQ should display agency name, solicitation title (Community Services—Marketing, Branding and Advertising Plan for the City of Buckeye), and solicitation (RFQ # 2019028) on all submittal packages. All RFQ responses should contain one original, one copy and one USB flash drive (in PDF format) copy of their qualifications.

Questions are due by 5:00 pm December 27 and should be directed to purchasing supervisor Tammy Vogel, 623/349-6175 or [Tvogel@buckeyeaz.gov](mailto:Tvogel@buckeyeaz.gov).

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

## **WPP UNLOADS SPORTS UNIT**

WPP has sold a majority stake in Two Circles data analytics and sports marketing unit to Bruin Sports Capital, media technology, live events, marketing and brand strategy company in White Plains, NY.

Founded in 2011, Two Circles handles ticketing, subscriptions, sponsorships, premiums and stadium development.

It has 180 staffers in London, Bern, New York and Los Angeles that serve clients such as the NFL, Wimbledon, Premier League and Formula 1.

The sports business is moving from a B2B model to a direct-to-consumer one, where growth is becoming centered around direct relationships between sports and fans, according to Two Circles founder Gareth Balch.

He views Bruin's relationships and experience in the global sports arena as "the perfect platform to enter the next phase of commercial growth."

Bruin employs 1,700 people in 37 offices worldwide.

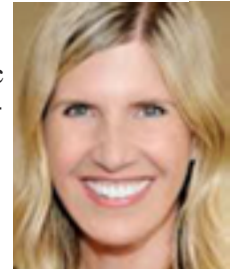
## **FORMER ABC COMMS EXEC TO WARNERMEDIA**

Jori Arancio, who left Disney-ABC in October after 21 years with the company, has been named executive vice president of communications at WarnerMedia's HBO Max, TNT, TBS and TruTV units.

At Disney, Arancio was most recently senior vice president of communications for ABC Entertainment and ABC Studios, overseeing strategic corporate communication efforts, consumer press campaigns, awards outreach and talent relations.

She had previously served as communications vice president at the company's Freeform streaming service, vice president of communications at ABC Daytime and SOAPnet, and communications manager of the Disney Channel.

Arancio will report to EVP, global communications, WarnerMedia Entertainment and Direct-To-Consumer Kevin Brockman. She had previously worked with Brockman at Disney.



**Jori Arancio**

## **SLOANE WORKS NEW YORK LIFE-CIGNA DEAL**

Sloane & Co. is working as PR firm for New York Life as it agrees to acquire Cigna's group life and disability insurance business for \$6.3 billion.

Cigna expects to realize around \$5.3 billion of net after-tax proceeds from the transaction, which it intends to use for share repurchase and repayment of debt in 2020. Its group life and disability insurance business will now operate within New York Life's portfolio of strategic businesses.

Working for Sloane on the deal were managing director Dan Zacchei; senior vice presidents Joe Germani, Ariel Kouvaras and Lauren Nussbaum; and senior associate Sarah Braunstein.

Credit Suisse Group served as investment counsel on the deal and Debevoise & Plimpton LLP was outside counsel.

## **ROGERS & COWAN/PMK REPS TV FESTIVAL**

Monte-Carlo Television Festival has selected Rogers & Cowan/PMK to lead publicity and media relations efforts and offer programming counsel on the American continent for the event's 60th anniversary.

The festival, which takes place June 12-23, is one of the first new clients signed by Rogers & Cowan/PMK since the two agencies merged.

Highlighted by the Golden Nymph Awards Ceremony—recognizing fiction and news programs from across the globe—the festival also includes private screenings of upcoming television projects, jury round table panels, press junkets, as well as red carpet and public events.

Publicity efforts for the festival will be led by Rogers & Cowan/PMK executive vp lifestyle Beth Andrews and co-president, entertainment and business strategy Michael Donkis.



## **SOROS GROUP TACKLES IMMIGRATION LAW**

The Open Society Policy Center, the public policy organization established and funded by billionaire philanthropist George Soros, has retained Washington-based government relations firm NVG to advocate on behalf of an immigration reform bill currently making its way through Congress.

OSPC has retained NVG to pitch support for H.R.2214 and S. 1123, the “NO BAN Act” (National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act), which would limit a U.S. President’s ability to restrict aliens from entering the country, as seen in the “travel ban” that President Trump introduced via Executive order in 2017.

A four-person team heads the account, including Joshua Hurvitz, who was previously legislative director to former Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-NY); Eden Shiferaw, a former staffer to congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH); Irene Bueno, who was deputy assistant secretary at the HHS and a special assistant to President Clinton in the chief of staff’s office as well as the Domestic Policy Council; and Andrea LaRue, who served as counsel to former Senator Majority Leader Tom Daschle.

## **SVB DIRECTS XPERI/TIVO MERGER**

Sard Verbinnen & Co. is handling the \$3B merger of Xperi, audio, technology products company, with TiVo, video entertainment outfit.

The companies say the deal creates an entertainment technology powerhouse and an industry-leading intellectual property licensing platform with more than 10,000 patents and applications.

The merged company will take on the Xperi corporate name with TiVo as an entertainment brand.

Xperi shareholders will own 46.5 percent, while TiVo while stockholders will own the balance.

With the deal, TiVo has shelved its plan to separate its product and IP business. That was supposed to happen in April 2020. The Xperi/TiVo merger is expected to close during the second-quarter of next year.

Sard Verbinnen’s John Christiansen, Megan Boucher and Alyssa Lorenzo are working the merger deal.

## **GAERLAN TAKES PR POST AT TRAVEL LEADERS**

Elizabeth Gaerlan, who has more than 20 years of PR, corporate communications and event management experience, has joined Travel Leaders Group as VP-PR and communications.



**Elizabeth Gaerlan**

She’s held senior VP slots at Weber Shandwick’s travel & lifestyle practice and travel specialist M. Silver Assocs, which was acquired by Finn Partners.

Gaerlan, who most recently was running her own firm, also worked as communications consultant for American Airlines and director of communications for Toys ‘R’ Us.

Based in New York, Travel Leaders Group is one of the nation’s largest travel agencies. It manages more than 6,000 leisure, business and franchise locations.

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

**Rock Paper Scissors** is partnering with Trees For the Future, a nonprofit organization that helps communities around the world plant trees, on an initiative to plant 10 trees for every media placement the firm makes. RPS says that it has made 2,596 media placements this year, which will result in 25,960 trees being planted. The music and tech PR firm says it was inspired to launch the initiative by a study showing that planting 1 trillion trees could solve much of the carbon emissions crisis.

**FF Los Angeles** and Fridays For Future, the international movement of climate strikers led by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, are collaborating on a campaign to highlight climate change’s local impacts. The agency is helping Fridays For Future launch a local tourism campaign that reimagines how vintage tourism posters from across the globe would look under today’s climate change realities.



**Stryker-Munley Group**, an integrated public relations and marketing communication firm, has opened three new offices, bringing its total number of locations to eight. The Boston office, to be led by Kevin Gould, will focus on sectors including integrated marketing communications strategy, brand reputation, corporate social responsibility, audience targeting and relationship building. The Kansas City location, with Rob Karwath serving as president, will offer specialties including healthcare, education and professional. With Casey Boggs at the helm, the Portland, OR office will provide services in reputation management, crisis preparation, cybersecurity support and nonprofits.

**Edelman and Basilinna**, DC-based strategic communications shop, have entered into an exclusive partnership designed to provide multinational China-and Middle East-based clients of both firms with expanded communications and government relations services in China, the Middle East and the US. The alliance, which combines Edelman’s integrated global communications services with Basilinna’s specialized strategic consulting services, is intended to help clients navigate through the challenging landscape of changing international market dynamics.

**Corporate Ink**, a Boston-based B2B tech PR and content marketing agency and a partner in Worldcom Public Relations Group, has been acquired by Greg Hakim, who was previously a vice president at the firm. Hakim will now serve as the agency’s president and CEO. Corporate Ink was founded in 1989 by former chair of Worldcom’s technology practice and B2B practice groups Amy Berman, who will continue to consult with the agency and its clients.

**MediaTracks Communications**, which provides radio and audio services for public relations, will celebrate its 30th anniversary on Dec. 22. The company, serves such clients as Pfizer, The Home Depot, Verizon Wireless and McDonald’s. “Radio—in its many forms—continues to play an important role for savvy public relations practitioners,” said Lustig, who serves as the president of MediaTracks.

## COMMENTARY

**Boeing finally fired its CEO on Dec. 23** after the *New York Times* slapped a damaging story about the aerospace giant's embattled chief Dennis Muilenburg trying to pressure the Federal Aviation Administration to allow the 737 Max jet to return to service.



**Dennis Muilenburg**

What was the 55-year-old thinking in trying to squeeze FAA chief Stephen Dickson during their first face-to-face meeting?

It was either a sign of his utter desperation or sheer hubris.

The Times reported that Dickson told Muilenburg to take a hike and get to work on supplying the documentation needed to get the 737 Max back up in the air.

Apparently pressuring the world's leading aviation regulator was too much for Boeing's board.

In its announcement about Muilenburg's "resignation," the board said it "decided a change of leadership was necessary to restore confidence in the company as it works to repair relationships with regulators, customers and other stakeholders."

Tellingly, Boeing refrained from thanking Muilenburg for his 34 years of service.

Boeing brought in Edelman in May to help navigate the 737 Max turbulence.

### **Wedding planning and bridal registry company**

**Zola** must remember to send a nice Christmas card to Hallmark for the priceless gift of PR that it received following the greeting card/media company's bone-headed decision to drop its ads that featured a same-sex couple.

Bowing to the demands of the right-wing One Million Moms Network, an entity of the American Family Assn. that was offended by the image of two brides kissing each other, the Hallmark Channel yanked Zola's ads.

A social media uproar ensued, leading to an apology on Dec. 15 from Crown Media Holdings, unit of Hallmark.

"The Crown Media team has been agonizing over this decision as we've seen the hurt it has unintentionally caused," said Hallmark CEO Mike Perry in a statement. "Said simply, they believe this was the wrong decision. We are truly sorry for the hurt and disappointment. Our mission is rooted in helping all people connect, celebrate traditions and be inspired to capture meaningful moments in their lives."

That spirit of inclusion has drawn the fury of OMMN, which now calls for a boycott of the Hallmark Channel for reinstating the kissing-lesbian ads and for being "open to producing LGBTQ movies in the future."

The advocacy group feels betrayed, since it views the Hallmark Channel as "one of the very last channels that families could go to and not be bombarded with po-

litically correct commercials and LGBTQ agenda."

Zola is happy that Hallmark reversed its decision and is thankful for its allies. The company is "humbled by everyone who showed support not only for Zola, but for all the LGBTQ couples and families who express their love on their wedding day, and every day," said Mike Chi, chief marketing officer.

The boycott Hallmark campaign by the OMMN has generated about 54K online supporters.

Here's a PR tip: expand the campaign to include Hallmark's line of "Boy Meets Boy" and "The Happy Hers" wedding e-cards.

How hypocritical was it for Hallmark to pull Zola's ad when it tries to make a buck from gay marriages?

**Anticipating an onslaught of fake news from Vladimir Putin and Russian "active measures"** (bots, troll farms, phony accounts and hack & dump operations) during the run-up to the 2020 elections, the Democratic National Committee has issued a handy-dandy primer on "combating online disinformation."

The reason for the DNC guide: "Countries that are resilient to disinformation and foreign influence rely on whole-of-society approaches focused on digital literacy and awareness of disinformation tactics."

The DNC recommends getting news from multiple authoritative sources. Their best advice DNC: Avoid Russian propaganda outlets RT and Sputnik and read George Orwell's "1984."

Orwell's "Animal Farm" is another good read during our time of rising inequality.

**The Reporters Without Borders group says 49 journalists were killed during 2019**, a 16-year low and a 44 percent drop from the number of journos who died during 2018.

The dramatic fall-off from the average 80 journalists a year murdered over the past two decades is largely due to the decline of reporters killed in war zones.

For instance, the 17 reporters killed in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan this year was half of the number who died in 2018.

RWB though notes that the number of journalists killed in countries that are at peace continues to be as high as previous years. For instance, ten journalists were murdered in Mexico during 2018 and 2019. Latin America is now as dangerous for journalists as the war-torn Middle East.

While the number of deaths of journalists declined, RWB reports a 12 percent rise to 389 in the number of arbitrarily jailed reporters. China, Saudi Arabia and Egypt account for half of the number of detained journalists.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all O'Dwyer's readers.

—Kevin McCauley