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IPG POSTS 15% JUMP IN Q4 REVENUES

Interpublic posted a 15 percent jump in Q4 revenues to \$2.9B as the firm helped clients adapt and enhance their businesses to meet the challenges and opportunities of the digital economy, according to CEO Philippe Krakowsky.



Philippe Krakowsky

IPG DXTRA, the collective of 27 brands including [Weber Shandwick](#), Golin, R&CPMK, DeVries Global and Current Global, registered a 14 percent growth in Q4 revenues to \$340.4M. It was up 15.1 percent, organically.

For the full-year, IPG DXTRA chalked up 10.9 percent growth to \$1.3B and 10.6 percent on an organic basis.

Andy Polansky, CEO of IPG DXTRA, said the PR operation posted double-digit Q4 growth on both a reported and organic basis. PR reported a double digit increase for the full year and a high single-digit jump organically.

Polansky singled out automotive, CPG, financial services, healthcare and technology as robust performers. The key North America and UK market posted double-digit gains for both Q4 and 2021.

Krakowsky anticipates 2022 to be “another year of strong growth.” He is looking for organic growth of five percent during the current year.

Interpublic’s 2021 revenues advanced 13 percent to \$10.2B. Operating profit soared to \$1.4B from \$588.4M in 2020.

APCO NAMES SHEARMAN NA HEALTH CHIEF

[APCO Worldwide](#) has named Mathew Shearman North America healthcare practice lead.



Mathew Shearman

Most recently, he was senior VP for PA and crisis communications at BCW, advising *Fortune* 500 companies in the healthcare category.

Prior to his five-year stint at BCW, Sherman worked in London at Ogilvy Healthworld and Portcullis Public Affairs.

He has handled clinical data readouts, diagnostics, cybersecurity, product recalls and efforts to support patient access to products to treat cancer, Alzheimer’s disease,

HIV/AIDS and COVID-19.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SEEKS PR PARTNERS

The University of Texas plans to sign agreements with multiple PR, communications and/or media relations firms to provide services to its 13 academic and healthcare institutions on an as-needed basis.

UT, which is 135 years old, has an enrollment of 240K students. Seventy-five percent of them find work in the Lone Star State within a year of graduation.

The university estimates that its graduates from 2002 through 2018 had cumulative earnings of \$268B. It has a faculty of 21K, and 85K healthcare professionals and staff.

UT will open its seventh medical system (Tyler) over the next several years. Its hospitals and clinics handled more than 9.2M outpatient visits and over 1.8M hospital days in 2019.

The RFP covers communications planning, crisis PR, issues management, thought leadership, social media, writing services, video/photography, collateral development, website design/development/maintenance, media buying, spokesperson training and media relations.

Proposals are due Feb. 28 at the Bonfire portal.

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



KELLY MOUNTS COMEBACK FROM TENEO

Declan Kelly, Teneo co-founder/CEO who resigned last May after he became inebriated at a Global Citizen event and engaged in inappropriate behavior, has reemerged.

He has launched Consello, a Madison Avenue advisory focused on merchant banking, corporate development, and mergers and acquisitions.

Since exiting Teneo, Kelly has advised Intel and a handful of clients, according to a report in the *Financial Times*.

Ireland-born Kelly, 54, began his career as a reporter for *Nenagh Guardian*, *Tipperary Star* and *Cork Examiner* before moving into PR.

He sold Gallagher and Kelly PR to then-Financial Dynamics for about \$20M and became head of its US operations.

FD was sold to FTI Consulting in 2006.

Kelly was appointed economic envoy to Northern Ireland in 2009, serving two years in that post before launching Teneo with Doug Band, who was president of the Clinton Global Initiative, in 2011.



Declan Kelly

360PR+ ACQUIRES CRC

360PR+ has acquired New York lifestyle shop CRC, which was launched in 2007 by Cindy Riccio to work in the personal care, beauty, health & wellness, food, tech and home goods categories.



Cindy Riccio

Riccio, who takes the executive VP post at 360PR+, worked as director of communications at Horizon Media, VP at Hanesbrands, director of advertising & communications at L’Oreal and director of PR at Sara Lee branded apparel prior to setting up her shop.

CRC clients have included Hanes Hosiery, Donna Karan Hosiery, Maidenform, Samsung Home Appliance, Chesapeake Bay Candle Company, Ceramex Natural Ceramide Skincare, Jovial Pasta, Simply Protein and Deep River Snacks.

360PR+ CEO Laura Tomasetti said her firm has collaborated with CRC and found “a clear, natural cultural fit with our two organizations.”

Tomasetti’s shop represents Hasbro, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, illy caffè, Mass. Bay Brewing Co., Netflix, Nintendo of America, Rockport Co., Silver Hills Bakery, Trek Bicycle, United Natural Foods, Inc. and Virgin Airlines.

MERCURY TAPS TRUMP CAMPAIGN GURU

Susie Wiles, a top advisor to former president Trump, has joined Mercury Public Affairs as co-chair of its Florida and Washington offices.



Susie Wiles

She chairs Trump’s Save America PAC that he formed after the 2020 election and served as his campaign advisor in the Sunshine State for his two presidential campaigns.

Wiles worked on the campaigns of Florida Senator Rick Scott and Governor Ron DeSantis.

Ashley Walker, partner at Mercury, called Wiles “a veteran campaign strategist with an expert ability to put her finger on the pulse of any issue.”

Omnicom owns Mercury.

ROSEN REPS BETHEL WOODS CENTER

Rosen Group has landed Bethel Woods Center for the Arts—a non-profit performance venue, museum and site of the 1969 Woodstock festival.



The agency will provide dedicated media relations and strategic communications support for Bethel Woods and its programming, and

usher in a new series of events and activations beginning with the TAP® New York Craft Beer & Food Festival.

“Rosen Group’s considerable communications and media relations expertise across many sectors makes them the perfect partner to help broaden our communications reach and further highlight all the shared experiences Bethel Woods has to offer,” said Bethel Woods Center for the Arts senior director marketing & communications Susan Fraysse Russ.

NEWS OF FIRMS

The Dilenschneider Group opens a Miami office. The office is headed by Jonathan Dedmon, who recently relocated to Coral Gables from Chicago. Dedmon joined the group shortly after its founding in 1991.

In addition to the new Miami locations, The Dilenschneider Group has offices and principals in New York, Chicago and Washington, DC. “Miami and Southern Florida are dynamic economies that continue to attract leading companies and individuals. It is an important location for any communications firm,” said agency founder Robert L. Dilenschneider.



Jonathan Dedmon

The Courage Collective, a diversity, equity and inclusion consultancy, launches Boundless, a company and fellowship program designed to create access for underrepresented groups in marketing/advertising, consulting and technology. Employers can use the platform to share jobs with its talent network or they can also work directly with the Boundless team to identify candidates for open job or internship positions. For early-career candidates, the program will begin in May and run for 12 weeks, with a focus on professional development, career growth and community.

Fiducia Investors, the capital markets strategy, execution and investment arm of North Sixth Group (which owns North 6th Agency) is one of the inaugural investors in venture capital firm Predictive VC’s flagship fund. Predictive focuses on high-growth tech companies, and its flagship fund is earmarked for companies across metaverse, machine learning and artificial technology.

Ballard Partners launches a practice group targeted at clients with an interest in legislative and regulatory matters affecting the cannabis industry. Firm partners Courtney Coppola and Eugene O’Flaherty will be chairing the practice group. Before coming to Ballard, Coppola worked in the administration of Florida governor Ron DeSantis as director of the state’s medical cannabis program. O’Flaherty was previously house chairman of the judiciary committee in the Massachusetts legislature, handling all bills that dealt with the legalization of medical and recreational cannabis. “The cannabis industry in the United States has developed with conflicting and evolving policies at the federal, state and local level,” said Coppola. “Our new practice group will help clients navigate the complexity of these ever-changing policies.”

TEAM LEWIS is completing its first year of a new approach to employee-directed philanthropy. Over the last year, **TEAM LEWIS Foundation** has given every employee the opportunity to nominate a charity to make a cash donation, resulting in more than \$2 million in cash and creative work given to charities across the world. To date, over 400 employees have participated. The Foundation also works with team members and their nominated causes on creative projects benefiting such organizations as the Elton John AIDS Foundation, HeforShe, The Music Man Project and High Fives Foundation.



HOW WEB3 CAN SEIZE THE MOMENT

Web3. Crypto. Metaverse. NFTs. Is there anything buzzier at the moment than these disruptive, polarizing and world-building technologies? From Facebook's rebrand to NFT releases from GameStop and AMC, we're in a frenzied media environment for all things metaverse and crypto.



Todd Barrish

Engineers and entrepreneurs are working to innovate the type of products and solutions that will turn the metaverse and Web3 from novelties to necessities. However, they should also be thinking about what role communications and PR will play in the launch of their new brands and services.

If the news cycle and conversation surrounding Web3 and the metaverse change on a daily basis, how can industry leaders expect to grab media attention and create a coherent narrative? A few key strategies can help thoughtful executives cut through the noise and make a name for themselves.

The moment of opportunity for Web3 leaders

When you work in public relations, one of the most common things you hear from clients is that they want to "create a category"—often one in which they're the only player. True moments of category creation don't come easily, and they often take years to establish and validate. But with Web3 and the metaverse, we're witnessing the creation not just of a new category, but of an entire industry that is ripe for leadership.

This moment presents a major need for thought leadership. If a Web3 founder can explain how their technology works and why we should care, they'll be doing a service not just for their own organization, but for the industry at large. Once a knowledgeable, visionary leader proves they have something valuable to say, they'll become a go-to source for the thousands of media stories to come on these red-hot topics.

The caveat

In a market defined more by hope and optimism than products and proof points, we're inevitably going to see companies trying to capitalize on the attention without having the technology to back up their claims.

The current Web3 environment cries out for thought leadership, but the last thing we need are the "fake it 'til you make it" entrepreneurs who believe they can succeed simply by gaining notoriety. We need real experts, creative thinkers who have done their homework and can explain what's coming next for the metaverse and our crypto economy.

Translators, teachers and students

The role of a good piece of thought leadership is about bringing clarity to complexity: a subject matter expert takes their detailed, domain-specific knowledge and translates it into a narrative that is engaging and understandable for a less familiar audience. The thought leaders who rise to the top of the Web3 and metaverse spheres will be those who are skilled at both translating complex concepts and teaching readers about how they work.

In a dynamic industry, our Web3 thought leaders will need to embrace one more role besides translator and teacher. These leaders will also need to commit to being perpetual students, always doing their research and learning more about the newest innovations and what might be coming around the

corner. Those executives who reach a point of expertise and then rest on their laurels will quickly find that their knowledge is outdated and uninteresting, while those who do the hard work of staying on the cutting edge will discover that they've built an organic audience of fans and disciples.

Todd Barrish is President of [Indicate Media](#).

HOW DATA TELL THE REAL CRISIS STORY

For any organization that's been the subject of an unfavorable news story or social media thread, it can, in the moment, feel like a tree just fell on your house.

Communications leaders can relate with the familiar rhythm of a breaking event: The link is forwarded to you by countless colleagues and peers. Your Twitter notifications light up with what feels like an endless array of posts. There may even be follow-up inquiries from reporters, customers or employees.

This is an overwhelming situation, to say the least. But based on years of using data to assess and diagnose digital events, it's often the case that the tree you thought fell on your house in fact fell in the woods.

Advanced PR data and analytics tools have enabled cutting-edge methodologies to take stock of an event's impact and reach in real-time, helping communications leaders make the determination of whether in fact a crisis is taking place and, most importantly, how to respond.

How can you use data to assess whether a situation is truly a crisis and what steps are needed to address it? There are three questions to ask as you analyze an event:

Is traction with a news story or social media post speeding up or slowing down? Engagement is almost always contained to the first hours of a post going live before it quickly tapers down. It's helpful to understand whether your storm is growing or if it's passing.

Is your event getting more attention than your brand's typical news or similar coverage? We consider a story or post as "viral" if it receives more than 10 times the average number of social media interactions a brand, reporter or outlet typically receives. You should tailor a risk threshold based on your organization's most relevant benchmarks, but comparing engagement to similar events tells you whether this is a unique occurrence or par for the course.

What audiences are really paying attention? News and social media posts can spread quickly. But just as important as the raw number of interactions taking place is understanding the personas of audiences that are actually seeing relevant content or talking about you. It's critical to assess whether coverage or conversation has spread to the customers, stakeholders or media that impact your business.

Inside a crisis bubble, there's almost always a bias toward taking action. But in our experience, the data often tells you that no action is needed and that certain responses will only direct more attention to an event.

That's why at Kivvit we use these steps and more to provide clients with Impact Forecasts, a data-driven assessment that pinpoints where a tree has fallen and gives powerful insight into how to—or how not to—engage.

Zach Silber is Chief Innovation Officer at [Kivvit](#).



Zach Silber

OMNICOM'S Q4 GROWTH INCHES AHEAD 2.6%

Omnicom CEO John Wren reports Q4 growth was up 2.6 percent to \$3.9B and operating profit showed a 1.3 percent uptick to \$622.5M.



John Wren

Wren highlighted OMC's organic growth of 9.5 percent for the quarter.

That performance included a 7.8 percent growth in the US, 10.1 percent in the UK, 12.7 percent in Continental Europe and 7.8 percent in Asia-Pacific.

Wren is "optimistic in our 2022 outlook" and expects "to continue to build on our firm's long-term record of improving profitability and sustained value creation."

KITE HILL LANDS PROTEUS UNDERSEA STATION

Kite Hill PR has picked up PROTEUS, an undersea station being developed by Fabien Cousteau, the grandson of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau, off the coast of Curaçao.

Kite Hill's work will include earned media and mission-driven strategies, with the goal of attracting partner deals and technology advancements.



Being billed as the "international space station of the ocean," PROTEUS will function as a global collaboration platform for researchers, academics, private companies, scientists and NGOs.

"We wanted to work with thought leadership and media relations specialists with a strong background in technology," said Proteus Ocean Group CEO Lisa Marrocchino.

DENTONS TAPS TRUMP ALUM

Dentons Global Advisors has hired Trump White House alum Ja'Ron Smith to buttress the government relations unit that it launched in January.

Smith was deputy assistant to the president in the White House Office of American Innovation and director of urban affairs and revitalization. He handled issues such as workforce development, criminal justice reform and opportunity zones.



Ja'Ron Smith

Prior to joining the Trump team, Smith was a staffer at the House Financial Services Committee and for Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC).

Most recently, Smith was executive director for the Center for Advancing Opportunity.

Ed Reilly, DGA CEO, said Smith "brings fresh insight and real-world experience on some of the most critical public policy issues facing companies that are looking to make a positive impact."

Dentons, the world's largest law firm, established DGA in 2021.

ON THE MOVE

The Libra Group hires Edelman and Wells Fargo vet **Emily Teitelbaum** as chief communications officer. Teitelbaum was most recently at Wells Fargo as vice president of public affairs communication. She was previously a vice president at Edelman Public Affairs. Before that, she served on the staff of US Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA). In her new post, she will lead all external and strategic communications across Libra Group, which has assets and operations across 50 countries.



Emily Teitelbaum

Tierney promotes **Tracey Santilli** to president. Santilli has been with the IPG agency since 2002, most recently serving as chief growth officer. In 2018, she initiated the agency's first strategic initiative committee focused on diversity and inclusion and is also a member of the IPG Women's Leadership Network and the host of Tierney's podcast, 29 Stories. "Tracey has been instrumental in helping drive the Tierney brand and business both inside and outside the organization," said Tierney CEO Mary Stengel Austen. Tierney has also promoted **Catherine Mazurek** from controller to chief financial officer.

French/West/Vaughan hires **Cait Brauner** as associate vice president. Brauner comes to FWV from Sovereign Brands Fine Wines & Spirits, where she was communications director. In her new post, she will support accounts in the entertainment, consumer lifestyle and pet/vet spaces. FWV has also brought on **Eliza Irwin** as an account coordinator.

VisitPittsburgh names **Susan Klein** chief marketing officer. Klein was most recently head of content marketing at Doublespace. She also founded San Francisco-based Oculus Marketing and served as head of marketing communications and visitor services for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. "Susan is a dynamic marketer with a high level of success building and executing multi-channel, business-to-business and business-to-consumer campaigns," said VisitPittsburgh president & CEO Jerad Bachar.



Susan Klein

Luquire appoints **Sonia Grunbaum** as senior vice president of business development. Grunbaum comes to the agency after 19 years at Zimmerman Advertising, where she most recently served as vice president of marketing. "Sonia's track record of managing pitches for multi-million-dollar accounts, coupled with her ability to build relationships and open doors that align seamlessly with our agency culture and ethos, made her the ideal person to help us partner with more brands across the country," said Luquire CEO Brooks Luquire.

NinjaTrader Group, a provider of software and brokerage services to active traders, hires **John O'Reilly** as chief marketing officer. O'Reilly was most recently CMO at consumer-credit fintech platform OppFi. He was previously SVP, marketing for OptionsHouse, an options-centric brokerage acquired by E*TRADE in 2016. In his new post, O'Reilly will be responsible for leading NinjaTrader's brand and customer acquisition initiatives. "John's background and success as an executive in high-growth fintech firms will be invaluable," said NinjaTrader CEO Martin Franchi.

EDELMAN DRIVES AUTO PUSH FOR ONTARIO

The Ontario Ministry of Economic Development has hired Edelman to promote the Canadian province as a top automotive manufacturing center and a strong partner to the US.

The contract went into effect Jan. 26, which was before the Ottawa truckers strike forced automakers to cut production.



[The No. 1 independent PR firm](#) will highlight collaboration and trade ties between the US and Ontario and how the relationship results in mutually beneficial job creation.

Global automakers have invested more than \$6B in Ontario during the past two years, including \$4B to fund the transformation to electric vehicle production.

Edelman also will attempt to block any “Buy American” provision of US infrastructure legislation and advocate for an integrated “Buy North American” approach instead.

Edelman’s team includes Scott Evans, Toronto GM; Daniel Workman, Washington-based senior VP; and Lauren Nucciarone, Neil Trotter and Rajiv Prasad, who are members of the international marketing and promotion unit.

BLOOMBERG’S AD GURU JOINS SKDK

Mackey Reed, who was deputy director for paid media for Mike Bloomberg’s presidential campaign, has joined SKDK as senior VP as the Stagwell unit gears up its political advertising unit ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.



Mackey Reed

She was in charge of creative and production of Bloomberg’s more than \$400M TV advertising push.

Earlier, she was spokesperson and strategist for Everytown for Gun Safety, which is largely bankrolled by Bloomberg Philanthropies to advocate for gun control laws.

Reed began her career as an intern on John McCain’s 2008 presidential run.

SKDK played a major role in the 2020 presidential campaign.

Anita Dunn, a founding member of SKDK, was a senior advisor to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris during the campaign and worked in the White House during the transition before returning to the firm.

MERCK ADDS GAGEN MACDONALD VET

Johanna Herrmann, who was communications director at Gagen MacDonald, has joined Merck as VP, external communications & strategic operations.



Johanna Herrmann

She also is chief of staff for Cristal Downing, Merck’s chief communications & PA officer.

At Gagen MacDonald, Herrmann counseled *Fortune* 100 companies and helped them forge internal/external PR strategies. Earlier, she worked with Johnson & Johnson, helping to reposition Janssen and developing content for the 75th anniversary of the J&J Credo.

Downing lauded Herrmann’s “experience in leading high-stakes and high-visibility engagements, strong communications expertise, and strategic leadership capabilities.”

MANULIFE’S PASTERNAK SHIFTS TO DXC

Sean Pasternak, who did a nearly nine-year stint in the global communications department at Canadian financial services giant Manulife, is now head of global external communications at DXC Technology in Ashburn, VA.



Sean Pasternak

DXC, which has more than 130K employees in 70 countries, provides information technology services to about half of the Fortune 500.

It posted a 7.1 percent slide to \$12.3B in nine-month revenues (ended Dec. 31), and a 71 percent drop in net income to \$188M as CEO Mike Salvino charted DXC’s transformation plan amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pasternak reported for Bloomberg for 14 years before joining Manulife, the parent company of John Hancock Financial, in 2013.

AFFECT’S DOBRZELECKI JOINS GOODFUSE

Affect Strategies SVP Jen Dobrzelecki has joined GCI Group’s Goodfuse unit as president.

At Affect, which was acquired by Gregory FCA in April 2021, Dobrzelecki’s remit included managing talent development and agency operations, as well as spearheading new business and client relationships.



Jen Dobrzelecki

Before joining Affect, she headed up Lewis Global Communications’ New York office and held executive posts at M&C Saatchi PR and Golin.

In her new position, Dobrzelecki will be responsible for accelerating growth, managing client relationships and working to maintain the agency’s culture.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

Forbes, which is going public through a partnership with Magnus Opus Acquisition Limited, is receiving a \$200 million strategic investment from cryptocurrency and blockchain infrastructure provider Binance. Binance chief communications officer Patrick Hillman and Bill Chin, the head of its venture capital arm, are expected to join *Forbes*’s board of directors on the closing of the deal. In 2020, Binance filed a defamation suit against *Forbes* over an article about the company’s corporate structure, but that suit was dropped in February 2021.

Dotdash Meredith is ending the print version of six of its magazines. The April issue will be the last one in print for *Entertainment Weekly*, *InStyle*, *Eating Well*, *Health*, *Parents* and *People en Español*. The company says that about 200 employees—or five percent of its workforce—will lose their jobs as a result. The magazines were acquired when Dotdash, which is a subsidiary of Barry Diller’s InterActiveCorp, bought Meredith Corporation for about \$2.7 billion last year.

The European Publishers Council, a group of chairmen and CEOs of leading European media corporations, has lodged a complaint with the European Commission against Google for its ad tech practices. The EPC says the complaint is part of its “bid to break the ad tech stranglehold Google currently has over press publishers, and all other business in the ad tech ecosystem.”

COMMENTARY



Dan Edelman

Dan Edelman's firm has come a long way since going to work in 1952 for its first client, Toni Home Permanent Co., as it is poised to be the first PR firm to crack the \$1B annual revenues mark under the leadership of his son, Richard.

In 1948, Dan became the first PR director of THPC, came up with the idea of the Toni Twins (e.g., guess which twin uses the Toni and who went to the

hairdresser) and invented the idea of the media tour as he shepherded various sets of twins across the country.

He struck a PR gusher in Tulsa, where the twins were arrested for practicing cosmetology without a license. Dan bailed them out of jail and flew them to New York for an appearance on the "Today" show. The rest is history.

Richard Edelman recorded a 17.2 percent rise in revenues to \$984.9M for 2021. The US was up 15.5 percent to \$613.2M, while the EMEA region rose 23.1 percent to \$209.2M.

Edelman had come close to the \$1B mark in 2017, chalking up revenues of \$893.6M. Its performance slipped 0.6 percent in 2018 to \$888.4M and the firm clawed out a 0.4 percent gain to \$892M in 2019.

COVID-19 took a toll on the No. 1 independent firm's 2020 revenues as they fell 5.8 percent to \$840M.

The shop entered 2022 with a full head of steam, adding major wins such as Avis Budget Group in the US, FedEx in Latin America, Tinder in EMEA and MediaTek in APAC.

Edelman also added more than 800 staffers in 2021. The firm had cut nearly 500 people during 2020 as its year-end employment level stood at 5,143 vs. 5,616 in 2019.

It took Edelman 70 years to crack the \$1B mark. My hunch is that it may take a decade or so to break the \$2B mark.

Tone-deaf to PR. In his Feb. 8 note announcing the firing of about 2,800 employees, Peloton co-founder John Foley thought it was appropriate to give a shout-out to his wife.

He wrote:

"Jill Foley will be transitioning from her role as VP of Apparel in the coming months. Jill has been with Peloton since its inception. She founded and built our incredible Apparel business from the ground up. We are all very proud and grateful to Jill and the team that has helped her develop that sector of our business into what it is today."

Blackwells Capital, the activist fund pushing Peloton's sale, has questioned whether Jill Foley is the right person to run the apparel business or "just the person closest to Mr. Foley."

There is no word on whether Jill will be receiving a one-year free subscription to Peloton after she exits like other former employees.

The world's biggest companies are over-hyping their promises to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, according to the New Climate Institute.

It issued a study of 25 top companies and found their plans would cut emissions an average of 40 percent, not the 100

percent mark of "net zero" and "carbon neutral" claims.

The Institute's "[Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2022](#)" gauged the transparency of the listed company's climate pledges and gave them an "integrity" rating.

Shipping company Maersk was the only firm to earn a "reasonable integrity" mark. Apple, Sony and Vodafone chalked up "moderate integrity" grades.

Amazon, Google, Ikea, Volkswagen, Walmart and Hitachi were on the "low integrity" roster, while "very low integrity" scorers included BMW Group, Unilever, CVS Health, Nestle, Novartis and Accenture.

The companies have a year to clean up their acts before the 2023 Monitor is released.

Disinformation has emerged from the dark corners of the internet and is now coming for brands, according to a hefty 50-page report from Marathon Strategies.

"[The Age of Disinformation: The Weaponizing of Disinformation Against Corporate America](#)" report counts 5.7M mentions of S&P 500 companies from a disinformation string from November, 2020 to November 2021.

More than six-in-ten (61 percent) of the sentiment surrounding the identified conversations were overwhelmingly negative. The top targets of disinformation were communications services, consumer discretionary, information technology and healthcare.

The report notes that disinformation "can spread alarmingly fast, igniting from an ember to a conflagration."

It noted that from July 1-8, 2020, there were five mentions of Wayfair in connection with terms and hashtags associated with human trafficking conspiracy. That ballooned to more than 81K conversations by July 10.

Phil Singer, CEO/founder of Marathon, notes that while media coverage of online disinformation generally focuses on the political consequences of campaigns, spreaders of disinformation are stepping up attacks on corporations.

He views the report "as a wake-up call for all businesses about the need to be vigilant."

Remember Hong Kong?... As China basks in the coverage of the Beijing Olympics, the Media Freedom Coalition released a statement on Feb. 8 expressing its deep concern over the near elimination of the free press in Hong Kong.

That statement follows the raid on the offices of Stand News, arrests of its staff and the self-shutdown of Citizen News because it was worried about the safety of its workers.

The MFC mourned the "near-complete disappearance of local independent media outlets" in Hong Kong since the passing of the National Security Law in June 2020.

It said global confidence in Hong Kong's reputation has been undermined "by the suppression of human rights, freedom of speech and free flow and exchange of opinions and information."

The statement was signed by the governments of the US, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK, Finland, Austria and Czech Republic.

—Kevin McCauley