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IPG RECORDS 22.5% GROWTH IN Q2

Interpublic reported a 22.5 percent jump in revenues to \$2.3B. Net organic growth was up 19.8 percent overall, with the US division recording a 17.4 percent increase. Internationally, net revenues rose 24.4 percent.



Andy Polansky

First-half net revenues hit \$4.3B, up 12.3 percent from the \$3.83B recorded in Q1 2020.

At IPG DXTRA, the company's global collective of 27 marketing specialty brands, organic growth for the second quarter was 15.1 percent.

Andy Polansky, who is IPG DXTRA's CEO, said that all firms across the PR component of the division (which includes [Weber Shandwick](#), Golin, Rogers & Cow-

an PMK and Current Global) had "a strong quarter."

Polansky noted particular strength in the food & beverage, automotive, healthcare and government sectors. In addition, he said that both North America and the EMEA region did very well in Q2.

IPG CEO Philippe Krakowsky said the Q2 performance represents "a remarkable rebound from the impact of the pandemic on our business"

CRESANTI TO LEAD ACCENTURE GOV'T RELS

Accenture brings on Robert Cresanti, who was under-secretary for technology and chief privacy officer at the US Department of Commerce during the George W. Bush administration, to lead the company's government relations activities in North America and serve as head of its global government relations network.



Robert Cresanti

Cresanti most recently served as president and chief executive officer at the International Franchise Association. Before that, he was vice president, communications and public policy at computer software company SAP.

He has also held staff positions in both the US Senate and House of Representatives, and served on the board of directors of the Public Affairs Council.

"Robert brings a deep understanding of navigating complex legislative issues," said Accenture general counsel and corporate secretary Joel Unruch.

ST. KITTS SHOPS FOR TRAVEL PR FIRM

St. Kitts is looking for a PR firm to promote the Caribbean island in the US as a prime warm-weather destination as it rebuilds its tourism business that was walloped by COVID-19.

Prior to shutting down tourism in March 2020 due to COVID-19, St. Kitts attracted travelers from 24-64 (median age of 48) with a household income about \$100K.

They were tempted by the island's beaches, secluded bays/coves, range of water sports, golf, hiking trails, shopping and catamaran tours to Nevis, sister island of St. Kitts.

The St. Kitts Tourism Authority plans to hire a firm to support US visitation from current gateways and feeder markets, conduct media outreach, handle social media, arrange "fam" trips, and manage any potential crisis.

The selected firm will have extensive experience with the travel media and the ability to conceptualize and deliver programs to inform influence opinion formers with global tourism marketing, according to the RFP.

It also will not work with a St. Kitts tourism competitor (e.g., Anguilla, Antigua, Nevis and St. Lucia).

Proposals are due Aug. 6. Send them to Annie Sinzinger @ annie.sinzinger@stkittstourism.kn

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



CROSBY PROMOTES PREVENTIVE SERVICES

[Crosby Marketing Communications](#) wins a second consecutive five-year contract with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to provide strategic communications services to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

The \$12 million contract supports the USPSTF's mission to improve the health of people nationwide through evidence-based prevention in primary care.

Crosby's services to the Task Force include strategic planning, message development, media relations, social media outreach, crisis support and digital communications.

Founded in 1984, the USPSTF is an independent, volunteer body of national experts in primary care and preventive medicine. Its evidence-based recommendations on clinical preventive services cover topics ranging from vision screening in young children, to heart disease prevention in adults, to colorectal cancer screening in older adults.



OMNICOM'S Q2 PR GROWTH SURGES 16%

Omnicom's PR unit showed a healthy 16 percent surge in Q2 revenues to \$346M.

The unit, which includes such firms as FleishmanHillard, Porter Novelli, Ketchum, Mercury, Cone, Portland and Marina Maher, accounted for 9.7 percent of Omnicom's total revenue of \$3.6B for the quarter.



That overall number represents a 27.5 percent jump from the \$2.8B in revenues the company recorded in the same period last year.

For the first half, the PR unit registered a 5.3 percent hike in revenues.

POWELL TATE HIRES STATE DEPT. VET CURTIS

Meghann Curtis, who has worked with Time's Up and held several executive positions at the US Department of State, is joining [Weber Shandwick](#) public affairs unit Powell Tate as senior vice president, public affairs and social impact.

Curtis most recently served as chief operating officer for the Leadership Now Project, a network of business and thought leaders focused on strengthening American democracy.



Meghann Curtis

At Time's Up, she helped build the Care Economy Business Council, a group of leading U.S. companies that are working to address the caregiving crisis and corresponding "Shecession." She previously was executive vice president for international exchange Programs at the Council on International Education Exchange, and served as deputy assistant secretary of state in the

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Based in Washington, D.C., Curtis will focus on senior counsel for clients on a range of corporate reputation, public affairs and social issues briefs.

CLEVELAND INDIANS REBRAND AS GUARDIANS

The Cleveland Indians will change their name and brand identity after the 2021 season, after which they will be known as the Cleveland Guardians.



The team says that the new name was reached after sifting through 1,198 name options and over 140 hours of interviews with fans, community leaders and front office personnel. Over 40,000 fans were surveyed.

It also engaged a number of representatives of the Native American community, "including local and national organizations, leading researchers, and individuals willing to share their personal stories."

In addition to the new name and team logo, the team will also replace the "Block C" on its caps and uniforms with what it calls a "Diamond C," an evolution that "respects the tradition and heritage of Cleveland Baseball."

"Cleveland has and always will be the most important part of our identity," said team owner and chairman Paul Dolan. "While 'Indians' will always be a part of our history, our new name will help unify our fans and city as we are all Cleveland Guardians."

ON THE MOVE

Lifestyle apparel company **Kontoor Brands**, which includes the Lee and Wrangler brands, hires **Mame Annan-Brown** as executive vice president of global communications and public affairs. Annan-Brown joins Kontoor from the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, where she was head of external relations. She has also served as vice president of investment bank, marketing & communications at JPMorgan Chase & Co. At Kontoor, Annan-Brown will have responsibility for all aspects of global corporate communications.



Mame Annan-Brown

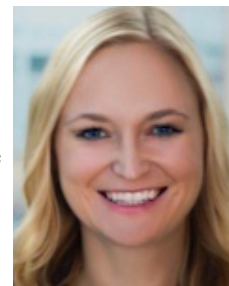
She also will have responsibility for leading government affairs strategies.

Carnegie Mellon University names **Nicholas Scibetta**, who previously served as partner and global director at Ketchum Global Media Network, to the position of vice president for university communications and marketing, effective Aug. 16. Scibetta comes to Carnegie Mellon from Stony Brook University, where he most recently was senior executive advisor of strategic marketing initiatives. At CMU, he is tasked with formulating and executing a communications strategy to enhance the university's reputation and further the goals of its various units, including its schools, colleges, units, campuses and locations worldwide.

Red House B2B Marketing hires **Grey Williams** as vice president of marketing operations. Williams joins Red House from software company Rangle.io, where he was managing director. He previously worked at Red House as a freelance account director and has also been a senior account director at Critical Mass and an account director at Digitas.

Hager Sharp appoints **Katherine Nicol** to lead its health practice as executive vice president. Nicol was previously a senior vice president at the firm. She has led numerous health client engagements and national campaigns, and has contributed strategic counsel and communications leadership to efforts around health topics including ALS, cancer, cardiovascular disease and chronic lung disease.

Dukas Linden Public Relations promotes **Shaina Tavares** to senior vice president. Tavares joined DLPR in 2016 as an account supervisor, and most recently served as vice president. She manages and services some of DLPR's largest clients, including Cathie Wood's ARK-Invest, and has been instrumental in the agency's growth. Before coming to DLPR, Tavares was an account supervisor at Edelman, and she previously served as an account coordinator at Schneider Associates.



Shaina Tavares

Hart, which has offices in Toledo and Columbus, OH, promotes Marc Paulenich to president. Paulenich previously served as chief operating officer and senior vice president of strategy. He succeeds Mike Hart, who has been Hart's president and CEO since 1993. Hart will continue to serve as CEO of the agency. As president, Paulenich will lead growth and advancement of service offerings that mirror a new agency vision and prioritize data-driven marketing, integrated marketing and creative excellence.

TRAVEL'S LONG-AWAITED TURNING POINT

By the time you read this, the travel recovery landscape will have shifted yet again. As we emerge from crisis containment and the last 15 months of switching between “pause,



Julie Freeman

ready, set” phases to full-on recovery “go” mode, this shift also means there’s absolutely no time to wait for companies to restart their PR efforts.

While MMGY Global predicted that the pent-up demand for travel would be unleashed in a big way, we never anticipated the speed of the trajectory. As our 2021 Portrait of American Travelers survey Summer Edition found, U.S. travelers are ready to put COVID concerns behind them and forge ahead

without looking in the rearview mirror.

The surge is well underway

Based on numbers from our most recent Portrait of American Travelers report, intent to take a vacation in the coming months has increased significantly, with 72 percent of U.S. adults planning to do so—up from 62 percent recorded at the beginning of the year.

While Gen Z already showed a high intent to travel, we saw the biggest jump in Boomers—increasing from 54 percent to 70 percent. This was no surprise considering Boomers had first access to vaccines and are more likely to have disposable income and available time to travel.

At the same time, with families separated for so long, there’s also strong interest in multigenerational travel, with 43 percent of travelers intending to take a vacation with parents, grandparents, and kids in tow.

With summer well underway, we’re already seeing a major spike in keyword searches for “beaches,” “parks,” “camping” and other terms usually associated with outdoor fun. As was the case even in the earlier days of the pandemic, there’s continued interest in road trips with 57 percent of travelers indicating they took one in the last year, and 76 percent intending to in the coming months. Also on the rise is travel spend on overnight leisure trips.

It appears we finally hit a crucial turning point. The beginning of summer showed a strong rebound in air travel, crossing more than two million travelers in a single day for the first time since March 2020. We’re also seeing strong conversions to domestic hotel bookings, with U.S. hotel occupancy reaching its highest levels in June since November 2019, according to research from STR.

With borders reopening at a fast clip—beginning with destinations like Iceland, Mexico, parts of the Caribbean and now the EU—we’re anticipating a huge surge of international travel on the horizon.

Leisure travel and spending for the next 12 months.

We also predicted early that leisure travel would precede business travel, which would return at a slower pace, with the long-lead nature of meetings and events naturally feeding into an extended recovery time. In a recent survey of its members, the Global Business Travel Association found that 79 percent would be “very comfortable” or “comfortable” traveling for business after receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.

Powering your PR strategy

We’re amidst a great travel reawakening. With the surge already upon us, and consumers ready and willing to splurge on great travel experiences, it’s time to harness that energy.

Whether you’re a DMO, hotel or resort, airline, cruise line or travel supplier, it’s essential to have a strategy in place that allows you to be nimble and progressive in your execution.

Redirect the narrative. For the past year, road trips, outdoor exploration and regional travel were the main story angles for journalists. While open spaces and domestic travel are still hot topics, now is also the time to court writers with story ideas and individual opportunities to get back to big cities and international destinations. But we must do it in a way that fits these times: taking cleanliness, crowds and general safety into account, and providing real-time support while on the road.

Be authentic to differentiate your brand from the competition. Staying true to who you are and what your brand stands for is crucial to re-engaging with and capturing bookings from repeat visitors and to attracting new ones. One of our most recent PR campaigns for our client, Visit California, showcased once-in-a-lifetime experiences from across the state. “Dreaming On In California” reminded consumers that California stands for dreaming big and called upon locals and visitors to apply and share their stories of postponed dreams, skipped plans and canceled celebrations from 2020 for the opportunity to make those missed moments come true this year, California style.

Community engagement plus inclusivity is critical to a go-forward PR strategy. Part of tourism recovery involves messaging, empowering and engaging locals as ambassadors for their own brand. By doing so, brands can highlight those stories that truly make a destination or product unique. In addition, travel brands can attract a more diverse audience by understanding the motivations and behaviors of under-represented travelers. MMGY Global’s recent release of the “Black Traveler: Insights, Opportunities & Priorities” report discovered the enormous spending power of Black travelers in the U.S.: spending more than \$129 billion on domestic and international travel before the pandemic.

Develop creative packages leveraging brand standouts and new travel habits such as reverse compression. We have always maintained that offering deep discounts isn’t a sustainable strategy, even if it garners headlines in the short term. The demand for travel has already led to weekends and peak travel times filling up, so we’re seeing what MMGY Global has coined “reverse compression.” Because deals are hard to come by, travelers are relying on flexibility to improve their experience and find greater value. Work-from-home and hybrid work models mean that mid-week travel is now a possibility, and travelers are continuing to expect the generous cancellation and rebooking policies we saw mid-pandemic. It’s up to us to design creative packages that grab media attention while meeting the needs of travelers.

Let’s go places now

As we forge ahead, our strategic planning and crisis-management expertise have empowered us to find what works best for each client. We know that the travel cycle is rapidly changing, and people will continue to expect this flexibility as they approach their trip planning. We understand innately that travelers are seeking out memorable experiences, are drawn to sustainable choices and are prepared to splurge on meaningful travel. As you embark on your PR recovery efforts, remain authentic and continue to mold your approach against an ever-shifting environment. One thing’s for certain: the competition is fierce, but we’re here to help and go places together.

Julie Freeman is EVP and Managing Director of [MMGY NJE](#).

VA HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE NEEDS PR

Virginia's Department of Historic Resources is requesting proposals from agencies that can provide public relations services.

DHR

Virginia Department Of Historic Resources

DHR is seeking an agency to develop a comprehensive public relations plan that increases awareness and an understanding of the agency's mission and services, gain new advocates and followers and increase engagement across platforms.

Scope of the work includes crafting messages that tell who the DHR is and what it does, developing comprehensive outreach strategies to reach stakeholders, providing website analysis and concrete recommendations that will add strength to the agency's online presence, creating a social media strategy and providing a comprehensive and detailed roadmap that clearly coordinates the public relations strategies created. Terms of the contract run from September 1, 2021 through project completion. Budget for the work is \$50,000.

Proposals are due by 4 p.m. (EST) on July 29 and should be submitted electronically through Virginia's procurement portal, [eVA](#). All bidding agencies must first register with eVA before submitting bids.

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

CITIGROUP'S HASSAN JOINS JPMORGAN CHASE

Citigroup global chief marketing officer Carla Hassan is headed to JPMorgan Chase, where she will take over as CMO in October, Reuters reports.



Carla Hassan

group and marketing director at Kellogg.

Hassan was named to the global CMO spot at Citigroup in September 2020 and was previously chief brand officer. While at the company, she worked on such product launches as the Citi Custom Cash Card.

Before joining Citigroup, she was executive vice president, global CMO at Toys "R" Us. She previously served as senior vice president, brand management, at PepsiCo's global beverages

MOWER SIGNS UP HOLMES FOR PR/PA POST

[Mower](#) has recruited Gary Holmes as vp, director of public relations and public affairs. Holmes joins Mower from the New York State Department of Health, where he was assistant commissioner, public affairs.



Gary Holmes

ground in Albany adds an important dimension to the scope of knowledge we bring to our advocacy work," said Mower president and COO Stephanie Crockett.

He managed the department's daily press response at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before that, he was director of communications at the New York State Department of Transportation and worked in broadcast journalism as news director at Time Warner Cable News Albany/Hudson Valley.

"Gary is highly regarded in the corridors of state government, industry and the press, and his experience on the

JOURNALISTS WANT RESPECT FROM PR PROS

More than 80 percent of the journalists surveyed in a new study say that they still depend on PR professionals for news. However, more than half (53 percent) say that the information they receive is often inaccurate.

The [2021 PR Media Report](#), conducted by [Global Results Communications](#), polled 1,026 journalists between March and May of this year, asking them how they view PR practitioners.



A large majority of respondents value the relationship between journalists and PR pros. Only 10 percent said that their relationships with PR professionals were "not important." Close to two-thirds (62 percent) said the relationship was an important one, and over a quarter (28 percent) called PR people "a core resource."

When it comes to what kind of content journalists are most likely to use, the media release is number-one by a long shot, with 60 percent of respondents citing it as the top source. Such content as pitches/article abstracts (15 percent), press kits (8 percent) and contributed articles (6 percent) lagged considerably behind.

The main reason for a piece of content to not be used, respondents said, was that it had "no relevance to readers," which was cited by 53 percent. About a third (30 percent) said they steer clear of content that they deem "too promotional," and eight percent said they had turned down content that had "no editorial value, insight or perspective."

What respondents want is "respect/understanding of what journalists need." Almost half (45 percent) said that was the quality they most appreciate in a PR professional. However, more than half (56 percent) also said that was the area most in need of improvement.

NEWS OF FIRMS

[Durée & Company](#) launches Psychedelicpr.com, a microsite dedicated to the psychedelics market. The microsite is part of the firm's NeuroWellness practice, which includes CannabisMarketingpr.com. The agency says it created the microsite in response to its growing list of clients in the psychedelics space. Services being offered include strategic public relations support, marketing, branding, in-depth media outreach, and the development of corporate social responsibility initiatives.



[Qwoted](#), a platform that connects the media with industry experts, and [GlobalWonks](#), a provider of real-time expert insights for enterprises, form a partnership to give members of both platforms more opportunities to share expertise. GlobalWonks' knowledge experts will have early access to Qwoted's daily media requests, while Qwoted members will be pre-approved for listing on GlobalWonks' platform.

[The Hatcher Group](#), a Bethesda, MD-based firm that serves government, nonprofit and foundation clients, acquires Horne Creative Group. The addition of Horne Creative, formerly based in Alexandria, VA, expands Hatcher's team to more than 50 communications strategists, designers, digital experts, multimedia creators, event planners, writers, and earned and paid media staff. As part of the acquisition, Hatcher takes on managing Horne Creative's contract with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to support recruiting efforts for its special agent and professional staff.

PUBLICIS HAS 17.1% ORGANIC GROWTH IN Q2

Publicis Groupe reported a 10.7 percent jump in Q2 revenues to \$2.5B and 17.1 percent organic growth.

The company's U.S. operations posted 15.2 percent organic growth for Q2.

Business was up in all regions. North America reported 15.1 percent organic growth with \$1.53B in net revenue.

Europe was up 24.3 percent; Asia Pacific jumped 13.6 percent growth; Middle East/ Africa rose 22.8 percent, and Latin America advanced 15.9 percent.

The company's recovery was also strong across the first half of the year, with overall organic growth of 9.7 percent, and all individual regions showing gains.

CEO Arthur Sadoun said Publicis "topped new business rankings for the first half of the year, thanks to a strong run of wins." He predicts full-year organic growth of seven percent and an operating margin of 17 percent, barring "any major deterioration" surrounding the pandemic.

BERLINROSEN NAMES BOWDEN VP

BerlinRosen hires Jamitress Bowden as vice president of issue advocacy, working out of the firm's Washington, D.C. office.



Jamitress Bowden

Bowden most recently served as a spokeswoman for the Committee on Oversight and Reform, the main investigative committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In that position, she led media relations and communications strategy for investigations concerning such topics as the safety of booster seats and the politicization of the U.S. Census and Postal Service.

Previously, she was communications director for Rep. A. Donald McEachin (D-VA), and led marketing and communications strategy for the Office for Equity and Diversity at East Carolina University.

In her new position, Bowden will focus on storytelling and strategy work as she helps lead clients various issue areas, including education, environmental justice and philanthropy.

BerlinRosen's issue advocacy division serves clients including UNICEF USA, Freedom House, Fair Elections Center, Families Belong Together and Equal Justice Works.

LAZARD ASSET MGMT NAMES CHOI CMO

Lazard Asset Management has hired Joanne Choi as a managing director and chief marketing officer, effective immediately. Choi joins Lazard from Goldman Sachs Asset Management, where she was head of global marketing.



Joanne Choi

She is responsible for Lazard's marketing efforts and brand strategy across its global asset management client base, and will drive commercial opportunities through strategic marketing communications programs.

"Joanne not only has the relevant experience, but she understands the intricacies of our business and ways to position our strategies to best meet the needs of our clients," said LAM chief business officer Nathan Paul.

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Allison+Partners is named public relations agency of record for **California Pizza Kitchen**. The scope of work includes driving momentum around product launches and store openings through media relations and event support.

Allison+Partners will also support the brand's franchising initiatives, including spotlights of current franchisees, and aid it in tapping into real-time trends.

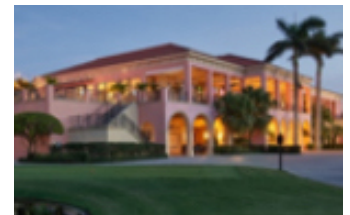
The agency's team has already taken the reins in launching California Pizza Kitchen's Chickpea Crust Pizza, spring menu and a new Hong Kong restaurant. It is preparing to execute several new campaigns through the rest of the year.

Bullfrog + Baum takes on PR agency of record duties for interactive wine experience platform **VIVANT** and **Château de Pommard**, a historic estate in Burgundy that houses France's only fully sustainable vineyards. The agency will work with both clients to promote their live experiences and tastings, biodynamic wines, world-class certified wine advisors, and the restoration of Burgundy's 300-year old Château, by developing and executing strategic public relations and partnerships, while also driving exposure for the brand in the food & beverage, technology, business, and lifestyle spaces.

Nickerson is now agency of record for **Quaker Lane Capital**, a real estate development, investment and advisory services company and certified minority business enterprise and women-owned business enterprise with offices in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Nickerson will lead communications strategy and manage all PR on behalf of the company, with a particular focus on the Boston and Philadelphia markets.

Walt & Company is selected as agency of record by **Light Field Lab**. Based in San Jose, CA, Light Field Lab is a breakthrough technology startup designing advanced, scalable holographic systems. Walt & Company will work as an extension of the Light Field Lab team to manage a range of communications services, including product and market leadership campaigns, media and analyst relations, industry leadership positioning, and media event activations, and editorial services.

LDPR adds **The Boca Raton**, a travel destination formerly known as Boca Raton Resort & Club, to its client roster. LDPR is overseeing the PR strategy for the resort's rebrand and transformation, as well as the overall media relations and media visit program for the U.S. The property, which had been a Waldorf Astoria resort since May 2009, recently announced that it was becoming an independent resort again, returning to its original name.



Trust Relations is named agency of record for **Renwick**, an athleisure lifestyle brand for women that is focused on golf. Renwick originally partnered with Trust Relations in January to help introduce and launch the brand's first product line to consumer lifestyle, fashion and golf industry spaces. Trust Relations is providing the company with services that include developing strategic messaging to convey Renwick's brand, managing media relations, product seeding to editors and reporters, and leading creative collaborations with target micro-influencers.

A PR PLAN FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The communications field must quickly collaborate to create a new discipline—and for no lesser mission than saving the planet and its inhabitants from environmental degradation and its disastrous health impact. Environmental and health PR pros must unite, blending our skill sets into one new public health communications discipline.



Gil Bashe, Bob Martineau

It's overdue; the line between environmental and public health communications disciplines becomes more blurred every day.

Let's critically assess the scope of the problem:

Environmental, Health Degradation Go Hand in Hand

Pollution doesn't just happen; it is a byproduct of modern life. The direct result of our impact on the planet, environmental degradation is accelerated by the collective hunger of our consumerist culture.

Though we breathe, eat and live in the environment, we often forget just how interconnected all aspects of our health are with the world around us. And it doesn't end with our personal health: Our world's economic health and a healthy environment are closely intertwined.

Also, poor environmental health goes hand in hand with a multitude of ills that impact BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities disproportionately.

Communicators Have Much in Common

Environmental and health communicators already share an understanding of complex systemic issues that can lead to crises on the one hand and can drive positive change on the other. This means that both can learn best practices from each other quickly and adapt them to meet particular needs.

Any step that's good for the environment also benefits the long-term health of both individuals and all of humanity's endeavors. That should be stressed as a common message, as long-term environmental health is the realistic key to sustainable human and economic health.

Environmental Risk is a Risk to All Health and Life

The threat to human health and life posed by environmental dangers must be communicated. As communicators, we must recast the connection between pollution and health risks as extremely immediate and personal through awareness building, advocacy and guideline-setting programs.

We also need corporate America to recognize the problems they face and the solutions they can effectively support. Historically, investors and analysts rarely connected shareholder value to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risk, but change is afoot.

Though they may not have realized it before now, health PR pros in agencies and corporations have an important role to play in saving our planet. By teaming with their environmental communications colleagues, they can exert enormous economic leverage throughout the world.

The tactics that help environmental and health communicators raise awareness and drive action already exist. By collaborating, reviewing best practices, adapting to the challeng-

es we face, and creating new, shared strategic imperatives, we can save our own health by saving the planet.

Gil Bashe is managing partner, chair, global health, FINN Partners. He is also an advisor to the Galien Foundation, DTRA.org and Newtopia; Health Tech World and Medika Life correspondent; and a digital health influencer. Bob Martineau, JD is senior partner, environment, energy & sustainability, FINN Partners. He served as commissioner of environment and conservation, State of Tennessee, and is a past president of the Environmental Council of the States.

HOW BIG BLUE STUMBLER WITH WATSON

“Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement.”

This quote from Samuel Johnson underlies a fascinating story about IBM's Watson supercomputer that appeared recently in the *New York Times*. It contains an object lesson for all communicators who must deal with various silos and their biases in large organizations.

For months after Watson's 2011 victory on “Jeopardy,” America was bombarded with messages about the new computing phenom, named for IBM's founder. But it developed that perhaps Watson wasn't as smart as he was cracked up to be.

According to the Times story:

“IBM declared in an advertisement the day after the Watson victory, ‘we are exploring ways to apply Watson skills to the rich, varied language of health care, finance, law and academia.’

But inside the company, the star scientist behind Watson had a warning: Beware what you promise.

David Ferrucci, the scientist, explained that Watson was engineered to identify word patterns and predict correct answers for the trivia game. It was not an all-purpose answer box ready to take on the commercial world, he said.

His explanation got a polite hearing from business colleagues, but little more.

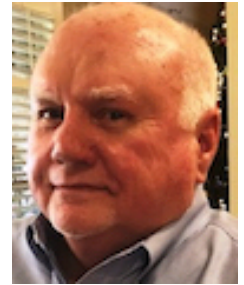
“It wasn't the marketing message,” recalled Mr. Ferrucci, who left IBM the following year.”

The Times story went on to place the marketing message in context:

“The company's top management, current and former IBM insiders noted, was dominated until recently by executives with backgrounds in services and sales rather than technology product experts. Product people, they say, might have better understood that Watson had been custom-built for a quiz show, a powerful but limited technology.”

The lesson for communicators? If you are at a great science and technology company, or are the curator of an organization with a large reputation, listen to your scientists, product engineers, researchers and the like. Don't be taken down the rosy path by the sales and marketing crew or the bean counters. The techies may bore the bejesus out of you, but if you listen, you will learn, and isn't it your job to listen and develop a credible narrative from what you learn?

Bill Huey is president of Strategic Communications and the author of Carbon Man (Kindle, 2010).



Bill Huey