



**Kevin McCauley**  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

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## **CCC PUTS \$800K PR BUDGET UP FOR GRABS**

The California Conservation Corps, which was created in 1976 by Gov. Jerry Brown, wants to hire a firm to handle PR and marketing services to promote its brand image and boost enrollment. The budget is set for \$800K per year.



CCC is dedicated to transforming the lives of California's young adults, ages 18 to 25, and military veterans through age 29, through hard work, education and training; giving them the skills and experience to launch a career and become assets to our communities, according to the RFP.

More than 120K Californians have participated in the CCC. They worked in targeted conservation programs to protect California's environment and natural resources.

CCC wants proposals from firms with leading-edge capabilities in strategic planning, account management, event planning & execution, media relations, paid media, stakeholder engagement and crisis communications.

The selected partner will be equipped to communicate to women, LatinX, African American, AAPI, and LGBTQ+ audiences. It also will conduct outreach to foster youth, non-diplomaed adults and lower income Whites.

CCC intends to award a three-year contract, effective July 1.

Responses are due May 15. They must be sent electronically to [Kiran.Varghese@ccc.ca.gov](mailto:Kiran.Varghese@ccc.ca.gov) with "RFP C4341-103222: Public Relations & Marketing" in the subject line.

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

## **CILLIZZA JOINS DENTONS GLOBAL ADVISORS**

Veteran political journalist Chris Cillizza has joined Dentons Global Advisors ahead of the Fall elections.

As senior advisor, he will help clients navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape. Besides the US, nearly 80 countries will hold elections in 2024.



**Chris Cillizza**

Cillizza has provided reporting, analysis, and commentary for the *Cook Political Report*, *Roll Call*, *Washington Post* and CNN.

DGA CEO Ed Reilly said Cillizza's understanding of American politics and global perspective "will greatly enhance our ability to guide clients through the challenges and opportunities presented by the 2024 election season and beyond."

Most recently, Cillizza has been publishing "So What" on Substack, and a sports newsletter called "The Replay."

## **KETCHUM'S O'BRIEN TAKES 5WPR HELM**

Michael O'Brien, Ketchum's president & global chief strategy officer, has joined [5WPR](#) as global CEO.

Dara Busch, co-CEO, has exited to pursue new opportunities. Matt Caiola, co-CEO, is remaining at 5W, responsible for its corporate & technology communications practice.

O'Brien, who has counseled Wells Fargo, 3M and Tyson, spent 23 years at Ketchum in two different stints. He left his SVP—director of brand marketing practice job in 2004 after a seven-year run for Cohn & Wolfe's NYC GM spot.



**Michael O'Brien**

He returned to Ketchum in 2009. Prior to working at the Omnicom unit, O'Brien was director of global brand communications at MasterCard.

O'Brien will oversee 5W's client services and operational departments, while counseling clients.

Ronn Torossian, 5WPR chairman/founder, said O'Brien "will bring immediate value to the whole 5W family."

## **FINN NAMES LEVIN HEALTH AFFAIRS COUNSEL**

[Finn Partners](#) has recruited cardiologist and noted patient care advocate Richard Levin as chief health affairs counselor, a newly created position.

He was most recently president of the Arthur P. Gold Foundation, which champions humanism in healthcare.

Prior to his 11 years of service at the Gold Foundation, Levin was dean of the faculty of medicine at McGill University, and cardiology professor and vice dean for education, faculty & academic affairs at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and NYU Langone Health.

Levin served two terms as president of the NYC affiliate of the American Heart Assn., and was co-founder of Qmed Inc., developer of a device that detects inadequacies in blood supply to the heart in real-time.



**Richard Levin**

At Finn, Levin reports to Gil Bashe, global health and purpose chair. Bashe called Levin one of "the nation's top voices for humanism in patient care."

Finn ranks as [O'Dwyer's No. 8 healthcare firm](#) with \$52M in 2023 fee income.

## S4 CAPITAL Q1 REVENUES DIP 19.7%

S4 Capital chief Martin Sorrell reports that Q1 revenues fell 19.7 percent to \$262M due largely to the slowdown in the technology sector. It dipped 16.6 percent on a like-for-like basis.



**Martin Sorrell**

The company expects client caution to persist throughout 2024 due to economic uncertainty. The company does forecast a revenue pick-up during the second half, though revenues will be lower than the full-year 2023 period.

S4 said it remains confident in its strategy, business model and talent. It believes its scaled client relationships position S4 well for growth in the longer term.

The emphasis will be on deploying free cash flow to shareholder returns. S4 noted that all significant merger payments are behind it.

Sorrell's firm employs 7,600 people, which is down 13 percent from a year ago.

## DISCORD NAMES HESS ITS FIRST CCO

Stephanie Hess joined gaming and communications platform Discord as its first chief communications officer.



**Stephanie Hess**

She was at Asana, where she handled global communications and marketing, and helped take the company public in 2020.

Previously, Hess held communications leadership positions at Zynga, Sun Microsystems and Oracle in addition to serving as VP, corporate PR at Fleishman-Hillard.

At Discord, she reports to founder and CEO Jason Citron and is tasked with unifying internal, external and

policy comms with marketing. She will help the company boost its outreach to parents, game developers and policymakers.

## JACKSON (MI) NEEDS ECODEV BOOST

Jackson (MI) wants a firm to handle PR, branding and marketing for its Martin Luther King Corridor Improvement Authority. Established in 2020, the MLK CIA promotes economic growth in Jackson's two main commercial corridors.

The goal is to further enhance Jackson's south side "into a thriving, world-class community," according to the RFP.

The hired firm will increase awareness of MLK CIA's events and services, ensuring broader engagement and participation within the community.



It will create a PR push to foster positive relationships with stakeholders and the media.

Jackson has budgeted \$50K and has capped reimbursables at \$25K for the one-year campaign.

Proposals are due May 17.

Send a hard and electronic copy to: Kari Kerstetter; Purchasing Coordinator; City of Jackson- Purchasing Department—8th Floor; 161 W. Michigan Avenue; Jackson, MI 49201; [kkerstetter@cityofjackson.org](mailto:kkerstetter@cityofjackson.org).

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

## ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

**CIIC PR** signs on to position **Wyndham Grand Barbados Sam Lords Castle All Inclusive Resort** as a premier destination for luxury hospitality and unique experiences in Barbados. With a focus on amplifying awareness of all that the property has to offer, CIIC's efforts will target the U.S. and local markets through comprehensive media relations strategies. Wyndham's debut in Barbados, the beachfront property features all new construction and is located next to the historic Sam Lord's Castle, overlooking the Caribbean Sea. "As all-inclusive hotels continue to be a strong trend amongst travelers, we want to highlight the unique experiences and unparalleled service that set this amazing property apart," said CIIC PR VP & partner Amy Sedeño.

**Praytell** is named the US PR & influencer agency of record for the **Singapore Tourism Board**. The relationship kicked off this month. Praytell previously worked with STB Americas to provide digital and influencer services. Under STB's direction, Praytell will manage US media relations, influencer relations and activations/events in service of STB's Passion Made Possible brand and Made In Singapore campaign, which spotlights quintessentially Singapore experiences. The Singapore Tourism Board is the tourism arm under the Singapore government, with the mission of championing tourism and building the sector into a key economic driver for Singapore. "Praytell will play an important role in maintaining momentum for travel demand for Singapore from U.S. travelers," said STB Americas SVP Rachel Loh.



**20 Two Studio** has signed on as AOR for luxury travel agency **SmartFlyer** and **Bernardus Lodge & Spa**, a 73-unit property in Carmel Valley on California's Monterey Peninsula. For Smartflyer, 20 Two Studio will provide expert positioning and travel trend commentary/forecasting, as well as leadership profiles for COO/managing partner Erina Pindar. 20 Two Studio will be responsible for strategic positioning, creative ideation, media and influencer relations, strategic partnerships, and awards support for Bernardus Lodge & Spa, in addition to working on the celebration of the property's 25th anniversary.

**Cookerly PR**, an Atlanta agency, is selected to provide media relations and government affairs support in North America for UK-based **DS Smith**, a provider of sustainable, fiber-based packaging. The agency will develop and implement strategic communications campaigns to enhance DS Smith's position as a global leader in sustainable packaging solutions, paper products and recycling. "We chose Cookerly because they have proven their ability to think strategically in developing and executing creative communications campaigns that produce measurable results," said DS Smith North America director of corporate affairs Ryan Rogers.



**Wireside Communications**, which focuses on the consumer and B2B tech sectors, signs on as agency of record for insurtech provider **Socotra**. Wireside is tasked with raising the profile of the cloud-based platform, which the company says enables users to accelerate product development, reduce maintenance costs and improve customer experiences.



## **TACKLING A NEW ERA OF MISINFORMATION**

We're confronting an era fraught with high political tensions, and we're poised to enter a contentious election cycle. At the same time, businesses are dealing with increasingly



**Kathy Bloomgarden**

advanced cyber-security attacks, and waves of misinformation are compounded by the rapid expansion of Generative AI.

Communications increasingly has a seat at the table in managing the fallout of misinformation. However, the speed at which information floods our newsfeeds, coupled with the growing usage of covert tactics to intentionally spread misleading content, calls for communicators to shift from a reactive approach to a proactive one.

With pre-emptive analytics and robust response strategies, communicators can identify the voices behind the threats, evaluate the best course of action and protect their brand from further damage. At Ruder Finn, our in-house analytics and tech incubator—RF TechLab—allows employees to explore new technologies and integrate innovative offerings for clients at the intersection of communications and technology.

### **Identifying misinformation through 'faction analysis'**

Misinformation spreads with more speed and scope than facts, especially online. According to [research done by the MIT Media Lab](#), falsehoods are "70 percent more likely to be retweeted on X (formerly Twitter) than the truth, and reach their first 1,500 people six times faster." [Research from Harvard](#) found that people who knowingly and willingly shared misinformation online were "more likely to also report support for political violence, a desire to run for office and warm feelings toward extremists."

The use of bots, or automated social media accounts, has made it easier for agenda-driven factions to perpetuate false narratives. At the end of 2022, the digital ecosystem erupted when [a fake X handle posed as Eli Lilly](#), claiming "We are excited to announce insulin is free now." The post garnered over 1,500 retweets and 11,000 likes in hours, causing Lilly's shares to drop more than 6 percent the day after the tweet.

What's more, factions can better conceal their identities and motives with AI Deepfakes while pushing out more convincing messages. We've seen the emergence of distorted—yet persuasive—deepfakes impersonating influential figures from [Taylor Swift](#) to [Joe Biden](#).

The potential damage of AI-generated video and audio extends globally, proven by the [recent attempt to manipulate India's general election](#). In April, fake videos of two A-list Bollywood actors criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi and called for people to vote for the opposing Congress party. The videos were viewed on social media more than half a million times in a week.

"Faction Analysis" is critical to identify the root source of false claims before they breed polarized echo chambers and, ultimately, create an erosion of trust in mainstream media. By identifying who is involved in factions that generate misinformation, communicators have the chance to develop a response strategy that addresses the actions of a specific group.

### **To respond or not to respond?**

When developing a strategic response to crises, whether derived from misinformation or truth, more analysis is need-

ed to know if to react, and if so, when. Although resonant at the moment, many viral instances are short-lived and quickly overtaken by the "next thing" in the media cycle.

While ten years ago viral moments had a larger share of voice in the public eye, the sheer volume of information that we consume daily in the digital era means that the cycle of relevancy moves faster in correlation. This has pros and cons for communicators—while it considerably shortens our window for a timely reaction in the cases where a response is needed, we must keep an eye on "conversation decay" which is when a viral topic may undergo a natural decline over time, often after an initial peak.

We've all heard the saying, "The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long." The increasingly viral nature of modern media allows for seemingly everyone to have a say, amplifying viral moments to levels that may appear too widespread for communicators to mitigate. However, as communicators, we have the power to leverage the rapid expansion of AI and new technologies to take control of corporate narratives and connect individuals with accurate and meaningful information.

*Kathy Bloomgarden is CEO of [Ruder Finn](#).*

## **NO COUNTRY FOR YOUNG PUPS**

Understanding why Republican South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem shot her unruly hunting dog is also understanding the ethos of the state she represents.

Life is tough for most of South Dakota's 887,000 residents. Winters are long and bitterly cold. The economy mostly revolves around agriculture and all the uncertainty the weather imposes on farming and ranching.

Hunting is a way of life out there, especially bird hunting, which is what Noem's 14-month-old wirehaired pointer Cricket was being trained to do; find those pheasants, quail and chuckers and flush them so hunters can get a clear shot. Most hunting dogs have this instinct. They just need to learn discipline when they're in the field.

Evidently, Cricket didn't get the memo, so rather than offer the pup to a loving home or even leave it at a no-kill shelter, Noem shot the unfortunate pooch in the face, an incident she describes in her new book title of "No Going Back" (which is ironic since going back to, say, 1924 is what her MAGA movement is all about).

What Noem and her handlers underestimated was the public reaction to her callous act. Off she went on a media tour to promote book sales and herself as a prospective Donald Trump running mate. The tour quickly became a disaster, however, when Noem was repeatedly questioned about Cricket's summary execution and her imagined meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Jung Un.

By Wednesday of last week Noem had canceled the media tour, her national political hopes as dead as Cricket.

*Kevin Foley owns [KEF Media Associates, Inc.](#), an Atlanta-based producer and distributor of electronic publicity. He can be reached at [kfoley@kefmedia.com](mailto:kfoley@kefmedia.com),*



**Kevin Foley**



## **DETROIT SEEKS PR FOR TRAFFIC SYSTEM**

Detroit plans to hire a firm to handle a public education and community engagement effort for its “Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation” program.

The SMART effort is designed to reduce traffic fatalities via the application of technologies (e.g., sensors, connected vehicles, coordinated traffic flows). The US Dept of Transportation is funding the SMART push via a \$2M grant to the city.



Detroit believes communications will be “pivotal in driving forward this transformative project,” according to the RFP.

The city’s PR partner will handle media outreach, social media management, and marketing campaigns to amplify awareness, gather valuable feedback, and cultivate support for the Detroit’s SMART program.

Proposals are due May 17. Interested firms must be registered on Detroit’s [e-procurement portal](#).

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

## **SKYLINE CAPITOL RALLIES TAIWAN’S ALLIES**

Skyline Capitol, the firm of former Utah Republican Congressman Chris Stewart, has inked a one-year deal to represent the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the US.



**Chris Stewart**

The firm is to rally public and private sector allies of the US/Taiwan relationship.

Skyline will work to “strengthen relations between TECRO and those deemed potential insiders should the Republican Party win the White House or Congress this fall,” according to its contract. It

will also connect TECRO officials with the people who influence the US Depts. of Defense, State and Treasury.

That effort will be “complemented with a media strategy that focuses on placing op-eds and interviews to advance the client’s goals and talking points.”

Skyline’s Christian Whiton, who was senior advisor for strategic communications at the State Dept during the Trump administration, handles the TECRO effort.

## **GOP COMMUNICATOR VAUGHN JOINS BGR PR**

Emma Vaughan, who most recently was deputy communications director at the Republican National Committee, has joined BGR Public Relations as a VP.



**Emma Vaughan**

She was responsible for the RNC’s PR strategy, working in conjunction with its members, the GOP Congressional and Senatorial panels, elected officials and candidates.

Vaughn also worked as Florida communications director and spokesperson for Trump Victory.

Jeff Birnbaum, president of BGR PR, said Vaughn’s decade of experience in strategic communications and public policy in DC and around the country positions her well to serve his firm’s clients.

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

A survey from [Matter Communications](#) found that nearly all healthcare marketers (94.4 percent) are currently working with a PR/marketing agency, with a sizeable majority (63.5 percent) planning to either increase or maintain their current investment this year. In addition, most of the healthcare marketers who said they don’t currently work with an agency said they did have plans to hire one this year (77 percent). When it comes to what those holdouts are looking for, the biggest draw was a firm that could offer PR, integrated marketing and creative services (cited by 38.7 percent of respondents). Perhaps not surprisingly, just about every healthcare marketer surveyed (98.4 percent) is also relying on AI in their work, with 46.6 percent often using AI tools for their marketing/communications programs, 38.4 sometimes using them and 13.4 percent saying they rarely use them but plan to increase their use in 2024.



[PAN](#) launches [a new website](#) and branding. The move is meant to reaffirm the company’s commitment to meeting client and employee needs for a strategic, creative partner that understands their growth goals. PAN’s new messaging also drops the use of “Communications” colloquially from the brand’s name. The brand refresh comes ahead of PAN’s upcoming 30th anniversary.

**Semaphore Communications** of Cape Town, South Africa comes on board as a member of **IPREX**. Semaphore, a B2B PR agency specializing in the tech sector, works with clients in the fintech, paytech, security, mobile messaging, ecommerce, renewables and advisory space. Its clients include Forrester South Africa, Network International, Entersekt, iIDENTIFii, Global Kinetic, Sprout Performance Partners and Engaged Business Turnaround. Under the direction of founder Elzaan Rohde, the agency promotes its clients through strategic counsel, messaging, media and analyst relations, social media, content creation, executive positioning and thought leadership.

**Mod Op**, a digital marketing agency, acquires brand strategy, package design & integrated marketing agency **LAM Design**. Mod Op works with such brands as Nestlé, John Deere, ExxonMobil and Baha Mar. LAM Design’s client roster includes Duracell, Reckitt, Sanofi, Panera Bread, BIC and Church & Dwight. The LAM Design follows Mod Op’s recent acquisitions of NY-based public relations firm Crenshaw Communications, creative agency Red Tettemer O’Connell + Partners and dPrism, a digital transformation, data and AI consultancy.



**Warren Green & Associates**, which has represented properties across Southern Africa, Central America and South East Asia for 16 years, is adding public relations to its services by partnering **Trip Whisperer Agency**. As an extension of Warren Green & Associates, Trip Whisperer, which was founded by veteran travel publicist Jessica Parker, will work to amplify its efforts among travel advisors and consumer audiences. The partnership kicked off in time for the industry’s annual Indaba event in South Africa May 13-16.



## **LEVINSON GROUP BOLSTERS NY, DC OFFICES**

The Levinson Group has hired Christina Pryor and Carla Amundaray-Gadea as senior directors in Washington and New York.



**Christina Pryor (L) & Carla Amundaray-Gadea**

Amundaray-Gadea, who joins TLG's Big Apple outpost, was a VP at Edelman for three years, supporting clients on consumer and social issues. Previously, she spent another three years at BCW Global focused on corporate communications and regulatory issues, and four years at Sphere Consulting, handling government investigations, disputes and transactions.

Pryor, who has more than a decade of experience in communications, law and policy, joins TLG DC from the US Drug Enforcement Administration, where she was a senior advisor to administrator Anne Miligram. Prior to the DEA, Pryor worked at Brunswick Group on litigation and crisis communications, and was an attorney at both Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, and Davis Polk & Wardwell.

## **MA COLLEGE SEEKS MARKETING BOOST**

Massasoit Community College is looking to enroll a firm to develop a digital integrated marketing and ad program that supports enrollment and community engagement for the Massachusetts school.

Founded in 1966, MCC enrolled more than 5K students for the Fall semester at its locations in Brockton, Canton, and Middleborough.

Sixty percent of the students are part-timers with the average age of 24.9 years old. Females account for 61 percent of the student body.



**MASSASOIT  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

MCC will evaluate proposals that demonstrate an understanding of higher education enrollment marketing, community college mission, updated marketing best-practices, and responsible utilization of the allocated budget.

Proposals are due May 21. They go to the [Commonwealth's electronic portal](#).  
[Read the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

## **C2 WORKS UK'S SEXUAL ABUSE CASE**

C2 Strategic Communications has been called in to represent the University of Kentucky's response to a sexual abuse lawsuit against its former swim and diving coach Lars Jorgensen.



**C2 STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATIONS**

The suit charges UK with "complicity and deliberate indifference" to the suit, according to a report in the *Lexington Herald Leader*. Sturgill, Turner, Barker and Moloney law firm retained C2 to work for the school.

Jorgensen has denied the allegations of sexual assault and harassment. He is charged with creating a "toxic, sexually hostile environment" in the swim program.

Chad Carlton founded C2 in January 2011. The firm has about 25 staffers and offices in Louisville, Lexington and Indianapolis.

Prior to launching C2, he was communications director for Louisville mayor Jerry Abramson, staffer on Doe-Anderson's PA team and political reporter for the *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

## **ON THE MOVE**

**Disney, Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery's** still-unnamed new sports joint venture has recruited SiriusXM SVP of communications **Jessica Casano-Antonellis** to head up its communications. Before coming to SiriusXM in 2022, Casano-Antonellis was VP, communications for Disney+ and Hulu and head of global communications for video sharing platform Vimeo. In her new post, she will be responsible for all communications, and serve as a member of the company's executive leadership team. The platform, which is slated to offer live linear channels like ESPN, ABC, Fox, TNT and TBS, and games and other sports rights from all three parent companies, is expected to launch in the fall.



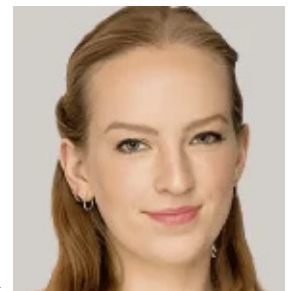
**Jessica Casano-Antonellis**

**State Street Corporation** names **Elizabeth Lynn** EVP and global head of investor relations. Lynn most recently served as managing director and lead finance officer for Citi's corporate and investment banking organization. She was previously global head of investor relations. At State Street, Lynn will be responsible for leading the company's engagement with investors and analysts, while providing counsel and insights into the company's financial performance and long-term business objectives.

**Tailwind Nutrition**, a sports nutrition specialist, hires **Kristen Flemington** as VP of marketing. Flemington joins the company from Dutch Bros Coffee, where she served as VP of consumer marketing, assisting the Oregon-based company in its expansion across the US, as well as working on the development and launch of its app. She previously led digital marketing for Adelsheim Vineyard and Stumpton Coffee Roasters.

**Signal Group** promotes **Julian Graham** to director and **Vinny Sheu** to director of creative content. Graham, who previously served as senior manager, provides international affairs, financial services and energy clients with public affairs and advocacy services. Sheu, who was senior manager, digital content, leads social media strategy and creative storytelling. He heads the firm's full-service creative studio, which includes photography, videography, and graphic design.

**Bevel**, an Avenue Z company, appoints **Libbie Wilcox** as director of its New York office and lead of its alternative asset practice. Wilcox joined Bevel in 2022 as associate director. Before that, she was a director at Hiltzik Strategies and she previously served as press secretary and communications director for both Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) and Rep. Sean Maloney (D-NY).



**Libbie Wilcox**

**Feldman Strategies** names **Chloe Barr** communications manager. Barr joins the agency from Sunshine Sachs Morgan & Lylis, where she worked on the issue advocacy team out of its Washington, DC office, managing strategic communications for organizations dedicated to social causes including reproductive health, global health equity, climate activism, and the gender wealth gap.

## COMMENTARY

**She's back...** The National Legal and Policy Center is sponsoring a resolution at the May 22 annual meeting of Mondelez International to make sure that the \$36B chocolate and cookie maker doesn't suffer the same fate that Bud Light did after it retained the services of transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney.



**Dylan Mulvaney**

The resolution concedes that shareholders expect companies to engage in issues that affect their bottom lines, such as taxation and regulation.

But many companies get caught up "in matters that are immaterial, or even detrimental to their businesses," according to the resolution.

The NLPC cites the backlash that rocked Bud Lite after it featured Mulvaney, a move the cost the beer its status as the No. 1 brew in the US, and triggered a decline in profits for parent company Anheuser-Busch InBev.

The organization expressed concern that Mondelez's iconic cookie brand, Oreo, formed a venture with the LGBTQ activist group PFLAG, and lists the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission as one of its partners.

The resolution calls for creation of a committee to examine the risks and consequences related to tie-ups with external organizations/people to determine if they threaten the growth and sustainability of the company.

Mondelez opposes the measure because it claims to have robust oversight and risk management processes in place.

The company believes "in inclusive marketing and work to mobilize brands and marketing partners to drive change, equity and inclusion across a wide variety of topics and viewpoints."

Dylan is the epitome of inclusive marketing.

**Getting better all the time.** The financial services sector is slowly regaining the public trust, which was shattered following the global meltdown, according to a supplemental report from the Edelman Trust Barometer.

Released May 7, the report found that 62 percent of respondents trust financial services companies to "do the right thing."

Trust levels are highest in developing countries such as India (83 percent) and Thailand (81 percent) and lower in developed nations like Germany (41 percent) and France (45 percent). The US trust level weighed in at 55 percent.

Lex Suvanto, CEO of Edelman Smithfield, acknowledged that financial services companies have made great strides in rebuilding public trust.

They can keep momentum by "building communications strategies about how they are improving the financial well-being and creating stronger financial systems and ensure that it is effectively conveyed to their key stakeholders," said Suvanto.

**Chill, Qu...** The PR chief of Baidu, China's biggest search engine, is sorry for posting videos on the country's version of TikTok praising the company for its work-till-you-drop culture.

The apology is a tad late as China's state-run Economic

Review reported on May 9 that she is out of Baidu.

Qu Jing had warned Baidu colleagues not to take any time off during weekends, and boasted that she works so hard that she doesn't even know what grade her son is in.

She also threatened to retaliate about staffers who complained about her management style.

Qu took down the videos after they were ridiculed as being out of touch in a changing China.

"I apologize that the inappropriate videos led to the public's misunderstanding of my company's values and corporate culture," she wrote.

Qu pledged to learn from her mistakes and improve the way that she communicates.

Due to the widespread coverage (*Financial Times*, BBC, CNN, *The Guardian*) of Qu's reign of terror, she should consider another line of work.

**Better To Let Sleeping Dogs Lie...** It's hard to figure out why Trump Media & Technology Group decided to issue a press release on May 6 to trumpet the appointment of Semple, Marcel & Cooper as its new auditor.

Headquartered in that accounting hotspot of Phoenix, SM&C officially came on board on May 4, and was appointed "after a detailed evaluation process," according to TMTG

C'mon. One wonders how detailed that search was. It was only a day earlier that the Securities and Exchange Commission announced that it charged TMTG's former auditor, BF Borgers, with "massive fraud" and "deliberate and systematic failures" in more than 1,500 audits.

Borgers only began work for TMTG on March 28. The SEC did not accuse the firm of screwing around with the TMTG audit.

Borgers took over the duties of Adeptus Partners, which was hired by TMTG's predecessor blank check company, Digital World Acquisition Corp.

DWAC retained Adeptus on Aug. 8, 2023 following the resignation of Marcum LLP on July 27.

To settle the SEC charges, BF Borgers agreed to pay a \$12 million fine, while its owner Benjamin Borgers agreed to pay a fine of \$2 million.

Both have agreed to permanent suspensions, effective immediately, that will prevent them handling SEC-related matters as accountants, which paved the way for SM&C to enter Trump World via a press release.

**Cops Didn't Learn Their Lesson.** Reporters Without Borders has condemned the wave of arrests, criminal charges and violence against journalists, and urge law enforcement agencies and university administrators to protect and respect the rights of reporters covering the current campus unrest.

Clayton Weimers, executive director of RWB USA, said the arrests at protests criticizing Israel's devastation of Gaza are reminiscent of the press freedom violations that swept the country in 2020 during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

The cops arrested and charged 146 journalists during the BLM protests four years ago, according to the US Press Freedom Tracker.

—Kevin McCauley