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FINN PARTNERS BUYS BACK STAGWELL STAKE

Finn Partners has bought back the investment stake that it sold to Mark Penn's Stagwell Group, and the two companies have amicably separated.



Peter Finn

As part of the deal, Finn Partners sold its interest in the Wye Communications joint venture to Stagwell. Wye was established as a Finn Partners' conflict shop.

"Our partnership with Stagwell, which started in 2017 and lasted more than four years, served us well," CEO Peter Finn told *O'Dwyer's*. He noted that Finn Partners has nearly doubled in size since the deal was made.

Finn and Penn attended high school together and have known each other for about 50 years.

[Finn Partners is O'Dwyer's No. 4 ranked firm](#) with fee income of \$109.9M in 2020.

Stagwell owns SKDKnickerbocker, [Sloane & Co](#), [Allison+Partners](#), [Hunter](#) and [KWT Global](#).

OMNICOM PR RECRUITS BCW'S FOSTER

Omnicom Group CEO John Wren has hired Chris Foster, North America president of WPP's BCW unit, to run its PR operation. Foster will take helm of the Omnicom Public Relations Group CEO job on June 28.

He will oversee FleishmanHillard, Ketchum, Porter Novelli, Cone, Portland, Marina Maher Communications and Mercury.



Chris Foster

Omnicom's press release announcing Foster's hire fails to mention his roles as BCW North America Group president, Burson-Marsteller executive VP & chief business development officer, and B-M US healthcare president.

He left B-M in 2010 for Booz Allen Hamilton management consulting firm but returned to the WPP unit in 2015.

Foster is a founding member of the Black Executive CMO Alliance.

Wren had left the OPRG CEO slot open since Karen van Bergen left in January 2020 for the dean job of Omnicom University. John Doolittle, who was interim chairman of OPRG, will become chairman with the arrival of Foster.

ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY SEEKS MARKETING

Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality, the environmental agency responsible for protecting the Commonwealth's water quality, is seeking proposals from agencies that can create and implement a comprehensive marketing plan for its Clean Water Financing and Assistance Program.



Scope of the work calls for creating a comprehensive CWFAP marketing plan to reach target stakeholders, implementing marketing and outreach activities, developing marketing materials and facilitating a virtual marketing team "retreat" for CWFAP staff and the marketing team to identify goals and develop an action plan, and to report on those findings.

Terms of the contract call for one year, with the option to renew for an additional year for ongoing support.

Proposals are due by 2 p.m. (EST) on June 3 and should be submitted via email to: carol.papazian@deq.virginia.gov.

Proposals can also be mailed or hand-delivered to: Department of Environmental Quality; 14th Floor Receptionist Desk; Attn: Carol Papazian, Procurement Manager; 1111 East Main Street, Suite 1400; Richmond, VA, 23219

Questions should be emailed to [Papazian](#).
[Download the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

BALLARD BACKSTOPS EQUALITY ACT

Ballard Partners picked up DC-based Freedom for All Americans organization, which advocates for full non-discrimination protection for LGBTQ people.

Specifically, Ballard Partners is working to encourage Senators to vote in favor of the Equality Act, which the House passed in February.

The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender.

The US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers support the Equality Act, which is opposed by some religious groups.



Kasey Suffredini is president and national campaign manager at Freedom for All Americans. He co-chaired the Freedom for All Massachusetts effort that led to the first statewide popular vote on transgender rights. In 2018, it passed by a 68 percent to 38 percent vote.

Brian Ballard heads the Ballard Partners team. Ana Cruz (staffer for Florida's ex-Democratic Senator Bill Nelson) and Trent Morse (Trump's liaison to the Dept of Health and Human Services) also work the Freedom for All Americans push.

FLORIDA'S SPORTS COAST NEEDS PR HELP

Florida's Sports Coast wants to hire a PR firm to position it as an attractive, outdoor family destination in the state, national and international media.



FSC, which is Pasco County's destination marketing organization, considers PR essential to its economic future and vitality. The Sports Coast wants to be known as the

place where people vacation like champions.

"FSC offers thrill-seekers and active travelers a diverse playground of bucket-list attractions and vibrant natural resources that evoke adrenaline-driven vacations and inspire leisure activities," says the RFP. "Our state-of-the-art sports venues offer athletes the perfect home field advantage to tackle the next tournament or championship."

The RFP lists a range of sports activities including beach & indoor volleyball, basketball, cheer, lacrosse, ice hockey, tennis, golf, pickleball, soccer, skeet and trap shooting.

Available leisure experiences are skydiving, aerial obstacle course, wakeboarding, hot air balloon rides, breweries, hiking/biking, kayak/canoeing, birding/wildlife, shopping, fishing/scalloping, Anclote Key, state park exploration and Florida's first snow park, SnowCat Ridge.

The PR partner will handle integrated partnerships, "un-conventional" promotions, brand engagement and storytelling.

It is expected to grow FSC's share-of-voice within national and regional media, as well as among social influencers to set it apart from competitors.

The selected firm will have an office in the Tampa Bay media market and be active in the Sunshine State's travel and tourism sector.

FSC will issue a contract that runs through September 2022 with an option to renew for three additional one-year periods.

Responses are due June 1. They go to: Pasco County Purchasing Department; 7536 State Street; New Port Richey, Florida 34654.

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

BRANDON TAKES JACK IN THE BOX IR POST

Chris Brandon will join Jack in the Box Inc. on June 7 as VP-investor relations after a 14-year stint at Domino's Pizza.

He exited Domino's as IR director and earlier managed its government affairs, PR and franchisee events activity.

Before landing at the pizza chain, Brandon did a four-year run at NASCAR in sales & marketing.



Chris Brandon

Jack in the Box CFO Tim Mullany praised Brandon's ability to build trusting relationships with the investment community and his deep knowledge of the franchise restaurant industry.

The San Diego-based hamburger chain has more than 2,200 outlets. It posted a 19 percent hike in revenues to \$257M during the quarter ended April 11.

Net income surged 220 percent to \$35.9M compared to the COVID-impacted year-ago period.

Jack in the Box stock trades at \$115 per share. The price ranged from \$64.83 to \$124.53 during the past 52 weeks.

DE&I-COMMITTED FIRMS ATTRACT TALENT

Almost four out of five employees say companies that are diverse, equitable and inclusive have a better shot at attracting high-quality talent, according to a new study from United Minds and KRC Research.

"[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A People Perspective](#)" surveyed more than 1,500 full-time employees at companies in Canada, the US and the UK to gauge how workers view the efforts being made by companies to foster a more welcoming, diverse workplace.

In addition to helping with recruitment, survey respondents said that strong DE&I efforts can help companies boost their performance in several key areas. Almost three-quarters (72 percent) believe that DE&I initiatives improve a company's bottom line, with 80 percent saying that those initiatives improve a company's reputation among customers.

However, fewer respondents felt that their companies were making enough progress with DE&I programs. While 57 percent said they were satisfied with their organization's approach to DE&I, that number dropped to 48 percent for Hispanic employees and 47 percent for Asian employees.

One in three respondents said they had experienced and/or witnessed microaggressions, one in three said they have experienced and/or witnessed discrimination or unfair treatment, and one in five has experienced and/or witnessed verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual harassment.

Only a small majority of those surveyed (58 percent) strongly believe that men and women are treated equitably in their workplace, with 53 percent saying that people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds have an equal chance to succeed, and 56 percent agreeing that racist, sexist and/or discriminatory language is not tolerated.

By not successfully addressing DE&I issues, the study says, companies are exposing themselves to significant risk. "Allowing bad behavior to go unchecked creates a toxic work environment and opens an organization to potential lawsuits," it concludes.



LLYC ACQUIRES APACHE DIGITAL SHOP

LLYC has acquired Apache, a performance and digital marketing shop that has more than 40 staffers.

Apache's services are geared to paid media, marketing automation, organic positioning, e-commerce, and marketplace and data analytics to enhance the success of brands and products in the digital ecosystem.

The deal aligns with LLYC's commitment to "deep digital business services" to harness synergies between artificial intelligence, influence, and digital marketing techniques to offer high-impact business solutions.

Apache founding members and Google veterans Jesus Moradillo, David Martin and Luis Manuel Nuñez, will continue to run the operation in tandem with Adolfo Corujo, chief strategy & innovation officer at LLYC.

"Apache's experience will play a key role in continuing to jointly develop the communication, marketing, and public affairs vision and solutions our clients demand," said Corujo.



DIGITAL REALITIES, AFTER THE PANDEMIC

While the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic has come and gone, the ways in which it has impacted society remain steadfast. Over the past twelve months, our world has become more digitally-dependent than ever, influencing and informing everything we do, from the way we think to how we behave.



Kathy Bloomgarden

In order to operate in this new society, communication has and will continue to be critical to ensure challenges are circumvented and opportunities are seized. In a world of constant screen time—where the average attention span has now [fallen to 12 seconds for Millennials and a mere eight seconds for Gen Z](#)—it's paramount that effective

communication be clear, transparent, authoritative and easily digestible, because consumers are looking for fast answers.

As behaviors evolve amid this new digital milieu, so too must communication. Here are three ways to effectively communicate in the post-pandemic digital era:

Don't just tell—story tell

In today's digital era, it has become harder than ever to capture consumers' attention. So how, then, do brands build an authentic bond with their intended audience? The key lies in developing an emotional connection, rendered through compelling and heartfelt stories around the brand's ethos. In fact, research has found that [92 percent of consumers](#) want advertising and content that feel like stories; stories are [22 times more memorable](#) than facts and figures alone.

At Ruder Finn, we're driving this type of storytelling through a new, analytics-driven content marketing offering dedicated to strengthening our clients' storytelling capabilities in a multi-platform approach.

Embrace new ways of connecting

While there's no real replacement for human interaction, many new and emerging technologies are offering an alluring respite from the social isolation of the pandemic "normal," particularly as consumer concerns over the coronavirus linger. Just consider [a new EY study](#), which found that despite the recent stabilization brought on by mass COVID-19 vaccination administration, people are more worried than ever. Indeed, the percentage of people who think they will live in fear of COVID-19 for at least another year has risen from 37 to 40 percent in the past four months.

With this change in consumer behavior, and as consumers continue to prioritize their health and safety over all else, meeting consumers where they are and bringing in-store experiences into consumers' homes will become ever-important. To do this, brands are increasingly using new and emerging platforms—from [TikTok](#) to [Clubhouse](#)—to retain earnest connections with consumers.

Acknowledge the wellness economy

Between lockdowns, limited in-person social interactions and constant screen time, consumers have faced mounting health challenges. A [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#) from July found many adults are reporting negative impacts on their mental health and well-being as a result of their pandemic stress, from difficulty sleeping (36 percent) or eating (32 percent) to worsening chronic conditions (12 percent).

But while there have certainly been several pain points, in many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant digital

culture have simultaneously allowed consumers to take charge of their well-being more decidedly than ever before. With healthcare tools at their fingertips, today's consumers are eager to become purveyors of their own wellbeing, utilizing new platforms to communicate with physicians, leveraging apps to track health conditions and make decisions and practicing more agency in their well-being by taking virtual fitness classes. Brands are encouraged to map this new wellness value shift, better positioning themselves to resonate with consumers in today's wellness economy.

No matter how they go about doing so, amid today's changing consumer behaviors, it's imperative that brands become better listeners than they have ever been before—using new tools of discovery to connect with consumers and tell their brand story with empathy and understanding.

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

TORONTO AREA'S DURHAM WANTS ECODEV PR

Durham, a regional municipality of 700K people that is part of Greater Toronto, wants a firm to handle economic development and tourism.

As part of North America's No. 7 metro area after Mexico City, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas and Houston, Durham has enjoyed robust growth from commercial investments in logistics, distribution and warehouse sectors, which hire relatively few workers.

Durham wants a firm to attract the "right kinds of high-employment density investments."

The RFP identifies those investment targets as pharmaceutical R&D/production, diagnostics, food & beverage, g-gaming, data processing, artificial intelligence, clean energy, 3-D printing, professional services, nuclear and cybersecurity sectors.

The PR partner will lure companies by promoting the region's "exceptional quality of life with services that contribute to strong neighborhoods, vibrant & diverse communities and influence safety and well-being."

Responses are due May 28 at the region's bidding site, [durham.bidsandtenders.ca](#).

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



JOELE FRANK WORKS BIG FOOD DEAL

Joelle Frank represents Core-Mark Holding Co., one of the nation's largest suppliers of food, supplies and logistics to convenience stores, as it is acquired by Performance Food Group foodservice company to create a \$44B combine.

Westlake, TX-based Core-Mark operates 32 distribution centers that service 40K customers in the US and Canada.

Richmond-headquartered Performance Food Group said the acquisition expands its geographic reach and increases its penetration of the fast-growing convenience store sector.

Scott McPherson, Core-Mark CEO, said the deal provides "investors immediate value and the opportunity to participate in the upside potential of being part of a larger, diversified and customer-centric supplier," he added.

The deal, which is subject to antitrust approval, is expected to close during the second half of 2022.

[Joelle Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher](#) has Aaron Palash and Jack Kelleher representing Core-Mark.



USAID SEEKS PR FIRMS FOR UKRAINE WORK

The US Agency for International Development's Transformation Communications Activity in Ukraine unit is looking for strategic communications partners.

The firm will provide TCA with "ad-hoc communications services and assistance on a flexible basis" to support "priority communications efforts of key partners such as the Government of Ukraine and USAID donor-funded programs."

TCA says its mission is to "increase the resilience of Ukraine's democracy through innovative communications initiatives."

It desires PR efforts and content that are "credible, grounded in fact and reinforcing of democratic norms and institutions."

Chemonics International, which is handling the search, anticipates hiring six to eight firms.

The firms will be assigned work in three categories: PR strategies/implementation/monitoring; TV, radio, out-of-home and online advertising; digital and social media outreach.

Proposals are due June 7.

Go to [TCA strategic communications announcement](#).

PATEL TAKES CMO POST AT POST CEREALS

Post Consumer Brands has named Claudine Patel chief marketing officer.

Patel most recently served as general manager, marketing for Reckitt Benckiser Group's RB Health North America division, where she led all marketing, digital and innovation efforts for the company's over-the-counter and personal care portfolio.

She also has held marketing leadership roles in North America and Asia at the Coca-Cola Company, Kraft Foods (Mondelez International) and Kellogg's.

In her new post, Patel leads the strategy, integration and execution of brand marketing across paid, owned, earned and shared channels, as well as innovation

for the company's portfolio of cereal brands that includes Grape-Nuts, Alpha-Bits, Shredded Wheat and PEBBLES.

"Claudine is a highly progressive and growth-focused marketing leader," said chief growth officer Tom Dixon.



Claudine Patel

ABMAC REPS NMC'S INFRASTRUCTURE DEAL

Abernathy MacGregor handles investment firm New Mountain Capital's \$1.1B cash deal to acquire Aegion Corp, the St. Louis-based company that protects and upgrades critical drinking water, wastewater and energy assets.

On May 18, Aegion became a private company that will no longer trade on the Nasdaq.

CEO Rob Tullman said the NMC deal is the first step in advancing Aegion's position as a protector of

communities and the environment.

The company posted \$181M in Q1 revenues and net income of \$1.4M.

Abernathy MacGregor's Dana Gorman handles NMC, which has more than \$30B in assets under management and is based in New York.

The strategic communications shop is part of France-based Havas Group's AMO network.



ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

[Allison+Partners](#) adds **Blueair LLC**, a Unilever brand that produces air purification systems for homes and the professional market. The scope of work includes campaign development, overall brand and product PR, integrated marketing strategy and projects, including video development, influencer relations and social media campaigns. The agency will also work to elevate the brand's global advocacy program focusing on Clean Air for Children in the U.S., maintaining its CSR program and building a thought leadership platform for the company. The account will be serviced out of the agency's Washington, D.C. office.



Hill+Knowlton Strategies picks up **MANA Group**, an entertainment company launched by former triathlete Chris McCormack. H+K will focus on the brand's Pho3nix Foundation, a non-profit organization that leverages sports to enhance underprivileged children's health and well-being. The agency will work to raise the profile of the foundation's Sub 7 Sub 8 challenge, which will see four renowned triathletes attempt to complete a full distance triathlon in under seven (men) or eight hours (women).

Eleven Six PR lands **Atlantis Paradise Island** in The Bahamas. Eleven Six is charged with developing and executing strategic PR, marketing and social media campaigns, storytelling, creative partnerships and programming, media relations and content curation for the resort. The agency is also working the openings of the Regent Phu Quoc in Phu Quoc, Vietnam and The Opus Westchester in White Plains, NY. Eleven Six is also guiding all its new clients through Covid-19 recovery.



SourceCode Communications lands automation company **Impact**. The relationship kicked off in February, when SourceCode collaborated with Impact to publicize its joining Shopify Plus as certified app partner for influencer and affiliate marketing, as well as working on the announcement that the company had acquired Trackonomics and Affluent. SourceCode will work to amplify Impact's perspective about why the partnership ecosystem is critical.

5W Public Relations adds **Shapermint**, an e-commerce distributor and online community of women's shapewear offerings, to their client roster. Kicking off the partnership, 5W provided support for Shapermint's inaugural 2021 Mother's Day campaign, a national search for its first-ever "Chief Mom Officer." "5W Public Relations understood our target audience from the onset of our partnership, and worked to develop a campaign that was real, impactful and recognized that being a mom is one of the most important jobs of all," said Shapermint chief brand officer Siobhán Lonergan.

Manifest is selected to oversee US consumer PR and SEO for **Student Beans**, a UK-based app that provides students with discounts from the world's biggest brands. Manifest will work with the company to deliver creative and reactive PR-led campaigns to support its customer acquisition strategy and increase brand awareness. "We're thrilled to have Manifest onboard to help us reach as many students with our dynamic PR campaigns as possible," said Student Beans PR manager Joshua Speers.



AD MARKET CLIMBED 52% IN APRIL

The U.S. advertising market surged last month from the same period a year ago, according to [national advertising revenue data](#) released by ad data experts Standard Media Index.

According to SMI's analysis, U.S. advertising revenues in April saw year-over-year gains of 52 percent. This marks the second consecutive month for U.S. ad market growth, as SMI's cross-platform product the U.S. Ad Market Tracker showed the U.S. advertising market in March also saw 24.7 percent gains from the same period a year prior.

Online advertising has driven much of this recent recovery, as U.S. digital ad spending was up 83 percent in April compared to April 2020. TV ad spending increased 15 percent year-over-year. A [recent report by the Interactive Advertising Bureau](#) corroborates digital's big gains, showing that online advertising in 2020's fourth quarter surged 29 percent from the same period in 2019 and accounts for the highest quarterly revenues on record for digital advertising in 20 years.

Despite the recent gains, SMI's data shows total U.S. ad spends remain 7.4 percent lower than they were in April 2019.

Data represented in SMI's Ad Market Tracker is derived from U.S. ad agency spending, which represents more than 90 percent of all U.S. advertiser investment.

FORBES' HUTCHISON HEADS TO DOW JONES

Matthew Hutchison will join Dow Jones as chief communications officer on May 24. He'll report to CEO Almar Latour, who praised Hutchinson's "digital-first thinking."



Matthew Hutchison

Most recently, Hutchison was CCO at *Forbes*. Earlier, he was partner at FleishmanHillard, senior VP-corporate communications at Tribune Publishing and VP-corporate communications at CBS Interactive.

Latour said Hutchison will "share our story with clarity, consistency and purpose, both internally and externally," and develop strategy for DJ's corporate

social responsibility efforts.

News Corp. Owns Dow Jones.

COUNTRY MUSIC 'BIRTHPLACE' SEEKS PR FIRM

Bristol, the birthplace of country music and Tennessee Ernie Ford, is looking for a PR firm to work with its new destination marketing organization to keep it in the spotlight as a top tourist attraction in the southeast US.



The firm will present the city of 25K people in "new, unexpected and cool ways," according to its RFP.

The desired firm will develop a strategic marketing plan that highlights Bristol's attractions and amenities with the "goal of increasing traffic to these establishments as well as to local lodging, retail and food services providers."

Bristol is the twin city of Bristol, VA, which is just across the state line.

Proposals are due June 1. They go to: Department of Administration; Purchasing Division; 801 Anderson Street; P.O.Box 1189; Bristol, TN 37621-1189

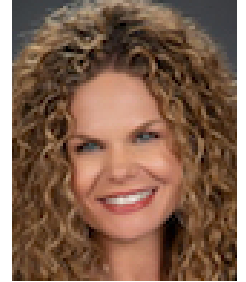
[Download RFP \(PDF\)](#).

INVESTING IN A FUTURE-PROOF WORKFORCE

Interns have been a fundamental part of our talent pipeline at Real Chemistry since our founder and CEO Jim Weiss opened the company's doors 20 years ago. Real Chemistry's very first intern now leads a media and engagement team of more than 50 best-in-class precision storytellers.

Graduates of our intern program have gone on to make meaningful contributions toward our mission of making the world a healthier place for all. Sometimes, they subsequently join Real Chemistry on a full-time, permanent basis. And while that's our preference, others take their experience at Real Chemistry and go on to make an impact at other organizations or for other customers.

In any case, we dedicate significant time and resources every year to designing an intern experience that prepares next-generation talent for a healthcare landscape that is defined by constant disruption, driven largely by increasing trends of consumerization, personalization and digitization.



Stephanie Garcia

One could make the argument that the resources and budget earmarked for running an internship program could be better spent pursuing seasoned talent with rich experiences and potentially lucrative business connections of their own.

After all, intern programs require a significant commitment, including having dedicated individuals oversee the program and enlisting others who are committed to being a line manager, mentor or supportive team member. But operating an intern program is not only good business—interns at Real Chemistry make meaningful contributions to customer work—it's also a way for us to "future-proof" our business.

At Real Chemistry, we know that our people are our greatest asset. We're proud of the programs we've operated in the past, but it's not in our nature to settle or rest on our laurels. This summer, our revamped (and virtual) intern program will welcome nearly 90 interns—selected from more than 7,000 applications—for an incredible 10 weeks.

For this summer's program, we knew we needed to approach things differently—in part due to the challenges of operating a program during a pandemic, but also out of a desire to make good on our promise to make our company a model for a diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment.

In addition to recruiting the most diverse class of interns at Real Chemistry to date, we're planning to maximize their experience by being intentional about the experiences we want them to have and communicating—maybe overcommunicating—to help set expectations and provide a roadmap to make sure they are on the right path from Day One.

Having an intern is so much more than an extra pair of hands—it provides them with an experiential learning program and an opportunity to contribute to meaningful client/customer-focused work. By committing to an ideal summer intern experience upfront, we worked backwards from there to make it a reality.

Not only will our summer 2021 interns be a great addition to their team and contribute to the work we do every day, but our teams will have an opportunity to learn from this younger crew and reexamine how we approach our work and each other in the future. That is, after all, a core tenet here at Real Chemistry—showing up and shaping the future.

Stephanie Garcia is chief people officer at Real Chemistry.

COMMENTARY



John Stankey

AT&T chief John Stankey said he is “a bit sad” that his \$80B deal to acquire Time Warner did not pan out as he hammered out an agreement to spin off the WarnerMedia entertainment unit and merge it with Discovery Inc.

That proposed spin-off follows another corporate flop by Ma Bell. It shelled out \$48.5B in 2015 to acquire direct broadcaster DirectTV. Stankey unloaded DirectTV in February in a deal pegged at \$16.3B.

To be fair to Stankey, he was not in charge when either acquisition was announced. He took over for Randall Stephenson as AT&T CEO in 2020.

The *Wall Street Journal*, however, portrayed Stankey, who was AT&T president/COO before ascending to the helm, as a cheerleader of both the Time Warner and DirectTV deals. He handled the integration of both companies into AT&T.

Both deals rank among the worst mergers in corporate history. It is an encore performance for WarnerMedia, part of the \$165B Time Warner/AOL merger fiasco of 2000.

David Zaslav, Discovery CEO who will helm the WarnerMedia/Discovery mash-up, only sees opportunities ahead.

“We are here today because John and I and our boards are confident that WarnerMedia and Discovery are better together,” he said during the press call outlining the deal.

We’ve heard that story before.

We will never know if president Trump wanted to place an image of his noggin on US foreign aid. On May 14, Joe Biden signed an executive order that revoked Trump’s effort to brand US foreign assistance.

The master-brander considered branding a way to hype US aid. He viewed it as a way for foreign nations to support US policies and to build awareness among victims of natural disasters of the “manifold efforts of American taxpayers to aid them and improve their lives,” according to a December 10 executive order signed by the then-lame duck president.

Trump’s order called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to develop a logo that embodies the values and generosity of the American people.

My hunch: Pompeo would have produced a Trump profile silhouette as the US logo to be slapped on all assistance packaging, projects and activities, and public affairs materials.

Remember Trump tossing those rolls of paper towels to survivors of Hurricane Maria in San Juan? Had the towels been branded with Trump’s silhouette, many would have tossed them back at him.

In organizing the latest effort to persuade ad buyers to boycott Fox News for its spread of misinformation surrounding COVID-19 and the “stolen election,” Media Matters for America discredits the notion that it is okay to place ads during the news part of the day.

“You might think your ads are safe if you run them along Fox’s straight ‘news’ programming, but each so-called

‘news’-side show has promoted Tucker Carlson in some capacity — a total of over 300 times since Nov. 1, according to Media Matters research,” says the boycott letter that was signed by more than 40 progressive groups.

It notes that companies and brands are speaking up against political extremists who attack our democratic institutions, undermine our public health response to the COVID-19 and climate crises, spew misogynistic beliefs, and stoke racial, anti-LGBTQ and xenophobic violence.

“Fox News’ propaganda is the key driver behind all of those depravities,” says the letter.

The network provided the following statement: “FOX News is about to close out its fourth consecutive year delivering new records in advertising revenue, so clearly Media Matters’ predictable ongoing partisan attacks have zero impact outside of their irrelevant echo chamber on social media.”

ExxonMobil, long a target of activist groups who claim the company skimps on investments in clean energy, has now been crowned the No. 1 producer of cheap single-use plastics (SUP) waste that is killing the world’s oceans.

A report from Australia’s Minderoo Foundation found that SUP account for a third of plastics produced each year, with 98 percent manufactured from fossil fuels.

Minderoo’s “The Plastic Waste Makers Index” reports that the 20 top polymer producers account for more than half of all plastic waste.

Exxon ranks No. 1 on the list, producing 5.9 percent of the world’s SUP. Dow is No. 2 at 5.6 percent, followed by China’s Sinopec (5.3 percent), Thailand’s Indorama Ventures (4.6 percent) and Saudi Aramco (4.3 percent).

The Foundation says these companies have “an extraordinary leverage opportunity in the fight against plastic production, particularly because there are so few manufacturers.”

Minderoo believes it is only a matter of time before policymakers and investors hold plastic companies responsible for polluting the world’s oceans. “Shareholders have a right to know if their money is being invested or lent to entities whose products have negative impacts on people and the planet,” says the Foundation’s report.

Big cities suffer COVID-19 hangovers. More than seven in ten Americans (71 percent) say they will not travel to urban markets this summer, according to a poll conducted for Morning Consult and commissioned by the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

That’s bad news for cities such as New York, which has seen a third of its hotel rooms (42,030 rooms) wiped out by the pandemic. About 200 hotels in NYC are closed for good.

The collapse of the business travel market has walloped hotels in major cities. Business travel, which is down 85 percent from pre-pandemic levels, isn’t expected to recover until 2023 or 2024.

Chip Rogers, CEO of AHLA, says COVID-19 has wiped out 10 years of hotel job growth, with nearly 3M jobs lost. The leisure and hospitality sector accounts for more than 25 percent of all unemployed people in the US. —Kevin McCauley