



**Kevin McCauley**  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



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## WYOMING WANTS TOURISM PITCHES

The State of Wyoming is seeking proposals from agencies that can provide tourism public and media relations services.



The Wyoming Department of Tourism is looking for an agency to develop and implement media, public relations and influencer programs that boost travel to and within the Equality State while differentiating Wyoming from other mountain west states.

Scope of the work includes creating PR campaigns that support visitation; devising an annual regional, national and international media exposure and outreach strategy; amplifying share of voice through social content and influencer marketing; creating and implementing a strategy to increase visitor interest to lesser-known Wyoming locales; collaborating and supporting initiatives and programs to celebrate Yellowstone National Park's 150th anniversary and providing strategic input for Wyoming's editorial and social team to create key messaging, storylines and other content opportunities for the Tourism Department's owned channels and media relations.

Bids, due by 2:00 p.m. (MT) on Dec. 8, must be submitted through the [Public Purchase online bidding system](#).

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

## APCO'S DECHTER ENROLLS AT PRINCETON

Gadi Dechter, who heads [APCO Worldwide's](#) PA unit, is heading to Princeton University, where he will be VP for communications and government affairs, effective Jan. 10.

Before joining APCO in 2015, Dechter was senior adviser to the White House National Economic Council and National Security Council.



**Gadi Dechter**

He has also served as deputy director of policy and strategic planning at the U.S. Department of Commerce, managing director of economic policy at Washington, D.C.-based think tank the Center for American Progress, and a reporter at Bloomberg.

In his new position, Dechter will provide strategic communications and federal relations advice to Princeton's president and other senior university leaders. He will also oversee the university's Washington, D.C.-based offices of communications and government affairs.

## FINN PICKS UP PHARMACY PODCAST NETWORK

[Finn Partners](#) is acquiring Pharmacy Podcast Network, which reaches more than 120K monthly listeners in the pharmacy sector, on Dec. 1.

PPN and its digital magazine, *Rx Influencer*, will operate as a division of Finn Partners led by executive producer & VP Todd Eury.

Pittsburgh-based Eury will report to Gil Bashe, Finn Partners' global health chair.

Eury will maintain control over PPN content decisions, while Finn Partners will have a direct connection to breaking trends, policies and needs of the front-line health professional community.

Bashe noted that pharmacists "demonstrated their life-saving importance once again in responding to the COVID-19 vaccination urgencies."

They also are leaders in consumer personal care, over-the-counter products and behind-the-counter devices to monitor healthcare concerns.

[Finn Partners ranked No. 4 in O'Dwyer's healthcare rankings](#) with \$34.1M in fee income for 2020.



**Todd Eury**

## EDELMAN PITCHES INVESTMENT IN BAHRAIN

[Edelman](#) has picked up the Bahrain Economic Development Board for strategic communications and media relations services to promote business investment, along with the Kingdom's brand and "value proposition."

The contract, which went into effect on Oct. 5, calls for Edelman to secure positive coverage in targeted US markets to reach potential investors, decision-makers and c-suite executives.

The \$70K effort has Edelman delivering a dozen press releases; ten story ideas and 20 newsjacking or interview pitches; six Q&As or op-eds, and conducting media outreach.

Edelman's Seth Hand, managing director, provides strategic counsel to the BEDB.

Simon Hailes, director, is the account lead; Sarah Algethami, director, handles media outreach; George Stothard, content lead, spearheads content development; and Rami Fahmi, account manager, works the Arabic media.

[APCO Worldwide](#) parted ways with EDB on Sept. 30.



## HUDSON CO. SEEKS PR FOR END HIV PUSH

Hudson County is seeking a firm to run marketing communications related to the launch of its Ending the HIV Epidemic push. The overall goal of the marketing push is to reduce Hudson County's HIV infections 75 percent by 2025 and 90 percent by 2030.



The selected firm will increase awareness of the HIV initiative and educate people about how to prevent, test for and treat the disease.

Hudson County wants a "multi-level promotional campaign on all platforms, which will include internet/websites,

television, social media, radio, newspapers and all other forms of media," according to the RFP.

Hudson County has budgeted \$263K for the campaign that will kick off Jan. 1 and run through February. There will be an option to renew for a year, subject to funding.

Proposals are due Dec. 3. They go to: County of Hudson; State of New Jersey; Attention: Purchasing Agent; 567 Pavonia Ave., 3rd Floor; Jersey City, NJ 07306.

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

## ICR HANDLES MANSCAPED'S SPAC DEAL

[ICR Inc.](#) handles Manscaped, which takes credit for creating the below-the-waist grooming category for men, as it plans to go public via a merger with Bright Lights Acquisition Corp. SPAC that is valued in the \$1B range.

Launched in 2016, Manscaped generated \$285M in annual trailing twelve-month revenues and anticipates more than \$500M in revenues by 2023.

The digital-savvy brand has more than four million customers in 38 countries and distribution deals with Target, Macy's and Best Buy. Manscaped also has partnerships with high-profile athletes such as Tampa Bay tight end Rob Gronkowski and sports organizations like NASCAR, UFC and the San Francisco 49ers.

Paul Tran, Manscaped founder, said going public is a crucial milestone in the company's journey. ICR's Bruce Williams handles investors and Keil Decker works the media for Manscaped.

## INDEPENDENT DIPLOMAT TARGETS VENEZUELA

Independent Diplomat, NY-based NGO that promotes democracy by organizing opposition movements and activists, has trained its sights on Venezuela.



It is advising Women for Democracy in Venezuela, a group composed of members of the country's opposition-led National Assembly and civil society on high-level negotiations and advocacy.

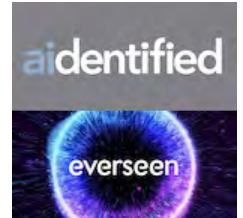
Independent Diplomat is providing strategic communications, diplomatic engagement services and conducting workshops via a \$250K grant from Global Affairs Canada. It also may contact members of the State Dept and the US Mission at the UN on behalf of WDV.

ID has worked with women in peacebuilding efforts in Yemen, Mali, Syria and Myanmar.

The socialist party of Venezuela president Nicholas Maduro claimed victory in national elections held Nov. 21. It was the first time in four years that opposition candidates to Maduro participated in an election.

## ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

[V2 Communications](#) adds [Aidentified](#) and [Everseen](#) to its client roster, expanding the agency's work building brand awareness of AI-driven technology companies. V2 has been brought on to establish Aidentified as the leader in AI-powered prospecting, build credibility of its platform across vertical markets, and showcase executives' thought leadership. The agency will execute strategic media, influencer, and analyst programs leveraging news, thought leadership, and customer stories. It will also pursue speaking and award opportunities. For Everseen, V2 will work to help the company solidify its reputation as the leader in visual AI for retail and to establish the expertise of company executives in AI-powered computer vision. These goals will be met through a robust news pipeline, media program to support news and thought leadership, content development, speaking opportunities and award wins.



[CIIC PR](#) is to lead public relations efforts for [Mundo Imperial Entertainment & Hospitality](#), an Acapulco-based brand of hotel and entertainment experiences. The agency will work for Mundo Imperial's full portfolio, which includes the Palacio Mundo Imperial, Princess Mundo Imperial and Pierre Mundo Imperial properties in Acapulco as well as the newest design-driven WAYAM Mundo Imperial hotel in Mérida, which opened in summer 2021.

[William Mills Agency](#) is selected to provide public relations services for [Vergent LMS](#), an omnichannel lending solution for lending institutions and financial services organizations. The agency has also executed a complete redesign and update of Vergent LMS's website. Founded in 2006, Vergent offers software optimized for consumer, small-dollar, auto and online lenders. "We are truly impressed with our team at William Mills Agency and the knowledge they bring to the table," said Vergent LMS chief executive officer Scott Putnam.

[Marino](#) adds Italian artisanal bakery [Oliveri 1882](#). The agency will lead a social media and digital advertising campaign aimed at building brand awareness and driving US sales for the company as it expands its presence across the US market. Oliveri 1882 makes and sells panettone, a Milanese holiday bread. The company says it can deliver fresh panettone to customers within 48 hours. "This is an exciting opportunity for Marino to help facilitate this transformation while also helping US consumers celebrate the holidays in true Italian style," said Marino executive vice president Robert Barletta, who oversees the agency's food and beverage practice.



[LevLane](#) picks up [Auto Lenders](#), a New Jersey-based used car dealer. LevLane will handle all creative strategy and execution, SEO, SEM, media and content marketing during the client's expansion. It will work collaboratively with the Auto Lenders team to build brand awareness while supporting the company's mission and vision for the future of car buying and selling.

[COMPASS Marketing](#) lands [ResClubs](#), a membership-based vacation real estate investment company. The agency plans a multimedia campaign including website development, digital and print advertising, collateral and social media.

## HOW CYBERATTACKS TARGET STAKEHOLDERS

For businesses hit by ransomware attacks, paying the ransom is often the most practical solution to recovering data and minimizing an extremely stressful situation.



**Josh Chodor, Meredith Griffiths,  
Evan Roberts**

However, paying a ransom, which can sometimes range into the [millions](#), is easier

said than done. In situations where a ransom isn't or can't be paid for a variety of business reasons—such as potential [sanctions](#)—organizations need to prepare for the avenues that threat actors will leverage to inflict significant reputational harm.

A common theme of today's ransomware attacks is [double extortion](#): A threat actor will lock a company's files and demand a ransom payment, and then threaten to release sensitive information that has been exfiltrated from a victim organization's environment. These threat actors may not care about the content of such data; it's just a money-making operation.

### Direct communication with key stakeholders

An evolution of the double extortion attack is particularly sinister: direct outreach to a victim company's stakeholders. This new strategy forces organizations, already under tremendous pressure, to act quickly to get ahead of the messaging around an attack in an attempt to reduce reputational risk and maintain stakeholder trust.

Over the past few months, cybersecurity industry [publications](#) have written about situations where companies faced this type of extortion from CI0p and REvil ransomware groups. In these scenarios, customers who provided email addresses to the target companies received messages indicating that sensitive personal and business information was contained among the stolen data.

Target companies, facing not only business disruption from encryption, but also damage to key stakeholder relationships, may be more likely to make the ransom payment to minimize stakeholder backlash.

Cyber actors also have relied on direct outreach to the press to tout their successes and publicly pressure organizations into paying ransom, something REvil leaders have [admitted](#). As an added threat, they will do their homework and [look into](#) a company's financial records for insurance policies in order to determine how much money they can truly extort.

Cyber actors may also publish victimized company information on [dedicated webpages](#) on the dark web referred to as "shame sites," which provide proof that a company was hacked and allow for niche trade journalists to potentially share news of the company's incident with the general public—before the organization itself has a chance to do so.

If the threat of ransomware groups using double extortion techniques and directly communicating with stakeholders wasn't concerning enough, a new tactic has emerged [called](#) "triple extortion." This tactic, recently deployed by the Avaddon ransomware group, involves a Distributed Denial-of-Service attack on a company's website should they delay in paying a ransom.

A DDoS attack isn't a new tactic, but it has been weaponized to increase pressure on victim organizations. DDoS attacks are defined as malicious attempts to disrupt or overwhelm a server or network infrastructure by flooding it with false traffic. They can be particularly painful for a company hit

by ransomware, as a vital artery for communicating with stakeholders is disabled. Cyber actors who organize DDoS attacks will leverage website access in exchange for a ransom payment—another hurdle in the crisis communications process.

### How companies can respond

As threat actors continue to adapt and evolve, companies too must plan and document their cyber communications response strategy in advance. A key tenet of this is preparation: companies test and drill against their cyber communications plan proactively to answer and solve questions that could make or break a business.

Such questions should include: How do you plan to contact customers, employees, and other stakeholders when systems are taken offline? Who would lead the crisis communications response to a ransomware attack, and what advisors are already retained or need to be hired to support that response?

It's often too late to answer these critical questions once the worst has happened. Without an integrated and transparent communications plan and approach, organizations should not expect customers and other stakeholders to remain patient as the incident evolves.

While cyber actors may use many different tactics to exert pressure on a target company to get them to pay a ransom, providing continuous and proactive communications around the issue with important audiences will help to mitigate the company's reputational risk of being truly paralyzed by an attack.

Facts are your best weapons in the early hours, days and weeks of an incident—be truthful and transparent about what you do and don't know and continue to adjust and update as remediation and restoration progress is made.

No matter the tactic employed by cyber actors, companies can still retain employee and customer loyalty, and preserve their reputations, by clearly and authentically communicating about the path forward, even if the destination isn't yet apparent.

*Josh Chodor is a Senior Consultant at [FTI Consulting](#). Meredith Griffiths is Managing Director of FTI Consulting's Crisis and Issues Management practice. Evan Roberts is a Managing Director at FTI Consulting.*

## RI'S PRESERVE SPORTING CLUB NEEDS PR

The Preserve Sporting Club, a four-season destination for outdoor enthusiasts, is scouting for a PR firm to increase awareness of the Richmond, RI-based luxury facility and generate leads for membership and real estate ownership.

The Preserve features amenities such as clay & grass tennis courts, 10 fly fishing ponds, shooting range, equestrian center with 100 miles of riding paths, 18-hole golf course, private helipad, 1,765-foot zip-line, rock climbing areas, walking and biking trails.

In addition to private residences, the Preserve offers guest lodging in single-family homes, townhomes, condos, cozy cabins, safari tents and a treehouse.

The PR firm also will secure positive media coverage for Preserve chairman Paul Mihailides, line up partnerships, manage media relationships and handle issues/crises.

It wants to retain a firm beginning Jan. 3. Proposals are due Dec. 3 to Laurie Hobbs, group director, PR & marketing, at [LHobbs@OceanHouseRI.com](mailto:LHobbs@OceanHouseRI.com).

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



## **PORT LAREDO SEEKS PR PARTNER**

Port Laredo, the biggest land port entry in the US, facilitating more than \$200B in annual trade with Mexico, is looking for a firm to handle Texas, national and international communications and marketing services.

Located on the Rio Grande, Port Laredo consists of four vehicle bridges, a rail bridge and an airport. It serves 15K to 18K trucks daily.

Port Laredo wants a firm to handle messaging, content development, branding, media relations, social media work, special events and advertising.

The firm will assist Port Laredo “in developing and implementing new strategies for economic development and supply chain solutions,” according to the RFP.

The Port will award a one-year contract and retain the option to extend the work for an additional two one-year periods.

Proposals are due December 8. Submitters are encouraged to send electronic proposals to Cit-E-Bid at <https://cityoflaredo.ionwave.net/Login.aspx> or hand-deliver them to: Jose A. Valdez, Jr.; City Secretary; City Hall, 3rd Fl.; 1110 Houston St.; Laredo, TX 78043. Mailed (USPS, FedEx UPS), facsimile, or email bids will not be considered.

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

## **RUDER FINN NAMES HARB US DESIGN CHIEF**

[Ruder Finn](#) has hired Krystal Harb, who has about 15 years of design experience, as US design director. She reports to Lee Manning, global design chief.



**Krystal Harb**

Harb previously served as vice president, design at Hot Paper Lantern. She has also been design director at Peppercomm.

Working for clients such as MINI, Forbes, Amazon Web Services and Facebook, Harb has handled programs from concept to execution to create high-impact campaigns across print, digital, social and emerging channels.

CEO Kathy Bloomgarden said design and creative is at the heart of RF’s legacy and is an area that will become even more critical for creating client experiences in the future.

## **STANTON, FGH, SVC ON ATHENAHEALTH DEAL**

[Stanton](#) client Bain Capital and Finsbury Glover Hering’s Hellman & Friedman are acquiring Athenahealth Partners, a cloud-based software company, from Veritas Capital and Evergreen Coast Capital for \$17B, which is one of the biggest leveraged buyouts of the year.

Athenahealth helps more than 140K ambulatory care providers increase clinical efficiency, optimize financial performance and improve patient outcomes.

Devin O’Reilly, managing director at Bain Capital Private Equity, said Athenahealth “is at the frontier of digital health in the US.”

Veritas Capital, which relies on [Sard Verbinen & Co.](#), and Evergreen Coast Capital will retain minority stakes in Athenahealth, along with the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and GIC—Singapore’s sovereign wealth fund.

Bain Capital’s Alex Stanton and Charlyn Lusk represent Bain Capital, while FGH’s Winnie Lerner handles H&F.

[Sard Verbinen](#)’s Andrew Cole, Jenny Gore and Julie Rudnick work for Veritas Capital.

## **ON THE MOVE**

**Nano Dimension** names former Microsoft global director marketing & communications **Greg Caldwell** to the position of vice president of global marketing. Caldwell was most recently head of marketing & sales enablement at Anark Corporation. He has also served as director, marketing communications at Sun Microsystems and senior manager, global public relations at HP. In his new post, Caldwell will lead the development of a global marketing organization that will have a footprint in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.



**Greg Caldwell**

**BD** (Becton, Dickinson and Company), a medical technology company, hires **Francesca DeMartino** senior vice president of investor relations, effective Nov. 29. DeMartino was most recently vice president, investor relations at Medtronic. She has also served as director, worldwide communications at Johnson & Johnson, and held senior investor relations posts at Macrocare and Omrix Biopharmaceuticals. At BD, DeMartino will lead all aspects of communicating progress of the company’s BD2025 strategy to investors and the financial community, including the company’s initiatives to drive shareholder value.

Computer software company **Shoreline.io** names **Chris Newton** as vice president of marketing. Newton comes to the company from Intellimize, where he served as vice president, marketing and sales development. He has also served as senior vice president, sales & marketing at Influitive. At Shoreline, he is tasked with leading corporate and product marketing, developing strategic partnerships, and building a steady sales pipeline to drive Shoreline’s growth.

**North 6th Agency** names **Patrick Brady** chief revenue officer. Brady joins N6A from [MikeWorldWide](#), where he was senior vice president of business development. He has also served as SVP of Business Development for MSL Group, senior director of global practices for Devries Global, and vice president of international network relations at Ketchum. Reporting to N6A chief executive officer Daniela Mancinelli, Brady will be responsible for revenue-related functions, including marketing and sales performance, customer success, pricing and revenue operations.

**Candy Digital**, a digital collectible company, hires **Andre Llewellyn** as chief marketing officer. Llewellyn comes to the company from Instagram, where as part of its global brand marketing team, he spearheaded the launches of Instagram Shopping and Instagram Stories. In his new role, Llewellyn, will oversee all marketing and communications strategy for Candy to grow its customer base and drive multi-channel engagement.



**Andre Llewellyn**

**Nuveen** promotes **Tara Giuliano** to head of marketing. Giuliano previously served as senior managing director, head of client and product marketing. Before coming to Nuveen in 2018, she was institutional global head of marketing and head of marketing for the Americas at UBS Asset Management. In her new position, she oversees a team that develops and executes on go-to-market plans aimed at acquiring, retaining and expanding client relationships.

## **IS YOUR REPUTATION VULNERABLE?**

Bad CEO behavior. An oil spill. A dangerous product. These are the kinds of catastrophes that come to mind when many of us think of the corporate crisis cautionary tale. It's something that happens to someone else. Not us. Many executives tell themselves that they're too small to suffer a major disaster. They think there isn't anything on their corporate radar that can do that much damage. And if something does happen, they believe they can respond quickly and avert any real crisis. Large companies may have anemic or woefully out-of-date plans in place. Or they believe they can throw money and staff at the problem.



**Julie Karbo**

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that no matter what the size of your company or how healthy your market is, no one's immune from damaging forces beyond their control.

We don't need to look to a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic for dangers to companies. To be effective, we must broaden how we define and mitigate a crisis. The smart executive realizes that threats come from beyond the scope of traditional crises.

There are four critical elements to an effective process which will help identify and lessen—and can sometimes completely eliminate—certain threats:

**Threat assessment matrix:** This stage helps identify any threats to the company that could result in critical damage. Once these events have been identified, an audit must be conducted to measure the sentiments of key stakeholders such as influencers, media, partners, groups, employees and analysts. This baseline audit forms a basis of comparison which allows you to effectively measure the scope and effect of the crisis.

**The message matrix:** In this stage, protective foundational messaging and customized narratives for critical stakeholders and personas are developed and tested. A matrix is as simple or complex as the number of stakeholders and the threats to the company. They can be calibrated according to likelihood and level of damage.

**The playbook:** Next, a custom playbook is created. This document will identify players and proactive and reactive programs and processes. While a master crisis playbook is essential, depending on the scope and nature of threats, some companies are well-advised to develop playbooks for individual divisions or threats.

**Post-threat analysis and correction:** If a crisis occurs, a thorough assessment of the event and response is carried out and any necessary corrections made. While an internal investigation is warranted, when a serious crisis occurs, the company must hire a reputable, fully-independent firm with deep knowledge of the financial, legal, technical and market implications. In some cases, local, state and federal authorities must also be notified and cooperated with.

The crisis plan is a necessity. Taking a laissez-faire approach to the possible—and in some cases the probable—can be deadly. The PR professional must initiate and play a central role in ensuring the company is protected. Assess and prepare to alleviate—and in many cases avoid—threats to your company's survival. Ensure the entire C-Suite is onboard and participating in planning, prevention and action. Crisis planning should be the ultimate team effort.

*Julie Karbo is CEO of [Karbo Communications](#).*

## **PASADENA SEEKS PR TO LINK WATER, CLIMATE**

Pasadena seeks a firm to create a communications program to build awareness of the water supply issues that impact the California city of 150K people and help it reach the goals of its comprehensive water systems and resources plan.

The "Water is Climate" PR push will highlight the "connection of water to climate change, and motivate customers to reduce their carbon footprint through water conservation, efficiency, reuse, rainwater and stormwater capture," according to the RFP.

The City believes an integrated water plan will help decelerate climate change, protect it from extremes and adapt to the unavoidable at the same time.

The selected firm will develop English and Spanish messaging to enhance drought awareness, as well as build community engagement and support for water construction projects. Pasadena plans to issue a four-year contract.

Proposals are due Dec. 6 at the Planet Bids portal.

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



## **OGILVY DRIVES CARVANA'S DC OUTREACH**

Ogilvy Government Relations is representing Carvana, the fast-growing online used car dealer, on data privacy and security matters.

The Tempe, AZ-based company reported a 74 percent surge in Q3 revenues to \$3.5B and a \$68M loss, which was up from \$18M a year ago.

Carvana blamed the deficit partly on "explosive growth" that created "significant operational constraints" in its system.

It explains that "buying more cars from customers leads to more last-mile pickups, more customer care interactions, and more complex title processing requirements, which in turn leads to more complex registration processing."

Ogilvy's seven-person Carvana team includes Chris Giblin (chief of staff to Texas Republican Rep John Carter); Karissa Willhite (deputy CoS to Jersey Democrat Sen. Bob Menendez); and Todd Novascone (CoS to Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran).

WPP owns Ogilvy.

## **AGRIBUSINESS GIANT CHS ADDS FORSTER**

CHS Inc., the giant agribusiness cooperative, has named Kirstie Foster as senior VP, marketing communications.

Foster was most recently VP of brand, communications and social responsibility at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. She previously spent 15 years with General Mills, where she was director of corporate and brand communications. Prior to joining General Mills, Foster was an account supervisor at Weber Shandwick.

In her new post at the St. Paul-based company, Foster is responsible for advancing and growing the CHS image and reputation across all global brands and services and leading internal and external communications, executive support, advertising, and all CHS digital platforms.

CHS chalked up \$38B in revenues and generated \$554M in net income for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31.



**Kirstie Foster**

# COMMENTARY

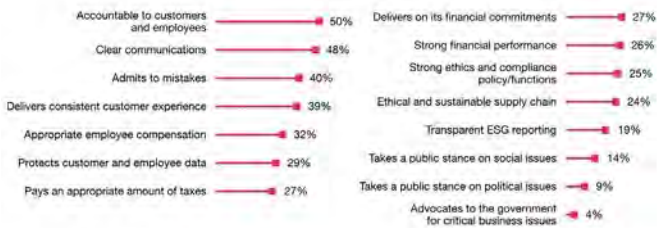
**PwC has found some “jarring disconnects”** when it comes to what consumers and business executives say drives trust.

Those discrepancies are especially glaring in the environmental, social and governance category, according to PwC’s survey of more than 500 executives and 1,000 consumers.

Fifty-six percent of business leaders cite strong ethics and compliance policy standards as “extremely important” in building trust.

Transparent ESG reporting gets a 51 percent score followed by ethical and sustainable supply chain (48 percent), takes a public stance on social issues (45 percent) and takes a public stance on political issues (39 percent).

ESG issues are not top-of-mind for consumers. Only a quarter of PwC respondents rate strong ethics and compliance policy functions as important.



## PwC survey: What builds trust in business for consumers and employees

That’s followed by ethical and sustainable supply chain (24 percent), transparent ESG reporting (19 percent), takes a public stance on social issues (14 percent) and takes a public stance on political issues (nine percent).

But PwC says ESG skepticism may also be a problem.

Almost four in ten (39 percent) say the real motive for ESG is for PR purposes.

**The International Olympic Committee has shamefully caved** to China’s propaganda machine in the aftermath of the Nov. 2 “disappearance” of tennis star Peng Shuai.

Peng, 35, went missing after she alleged on Chinese social media that she was sexually abused by Zhang Gaoli, 75. He was China’s vice premier from 2013 to 2018.

Chinese censors clamped down on Internet discussions of Peng’s case and imposed a media blackout.

The government counter-offensive kicked off Nov. 18 when the Women’s Tennis Assn. received a letter, purportedly from Peng, recanting her allegations against Zhang.

Photos and videos of Peng appeared on Chinese-government affiliated social media accounts on Nov. 19 and Nov. 20. Those staged photos showed Peng at home, in a restaurant and at a tennis event. No story here, Chinese officials hoped.

The IOC issued a statement on Nov. 21 saying that everything is hunky-dory with three-time Olympian Peng.

It said IOC president Thomas Bach had a 30-minute video call with Peng, who claimed to “be safe and well and living at her home in Beijing.” Case closed.

Peng even agreed to go to dinner with Bach in January

once he arrives in Beijing just ahead of the Olympic Games.

There is no word from the IOC about whether Bach brought up the sexual abuse charges during his conversation with Peng. One can safely assume that he didn’t, because that would have upset the power brokers in Beijing and jeopardized lucrative corporate sponsorships.

Human Rights Watch, though, isn’t willing to kowtow before China’s propaganda masters. It has criticized the IOC for collaborating with China’s PR machine.

“The IOC has vaulted itself from silence about Beijing’s abysmal human rights record to active collaboration with Chinese authorities in undermining freedom of speech and disregarding alleged sexual assault,” said a statement from Yaqiu Wang, senior China researcher at HRW.

HRW deserves a gold medal for standing up to China. Bach and the IOC fail to measure up.

**Blessed are the journalists.** Pope Francis lauded journalism during a ceremony on Nov. 13 that honored Reuters’ Philip Pullella and Televisa’s Valentina Alazraki for their more than 40-year coverage of the Vatican.

“Journalism is not so much a matter of choosing a profession, but rather of embarking on a mission, a bit like a doctor, who studies and works to cure evil in the world,” said the pope. “Your mission is to explain the world, to make it less obscure, to make those who live in it less afraid and to look at others with greater awareness.”

He said the world is in great need of journalists and communicators who are passionate about reality.

Pope Francis wants the journalism community to know “the pope loves you, follows you, esteems you, considers you precious.”

Pullella and Alazraki received the highest papal honor given to a lay person who is not a head of state.

**Rupert talks the talk but fails to walk the walk.** Rupert Murdoch told News Corp. shareholders on Nov. 17 that conservatives must play a role in the US debate over economic policies. But he worries that it won’t happen because conservatives remain fixated on Donald Trump and his wacky 2020 “stolen election” rant.

Bloomberg Opinion’s Tim O’Brien has the answer for Rupe. Use your power to get Fox News, *New York Post* and *Wall Street Journal* editorialists to stop running Trump’s lies and deceptions.

Murdoch is executive chairman of News Corp. (owner of WSJ and NYP) and chairman of Fox Corp. (Fox News). He owns 41 percent of Fox and 38 percent of News Corp. The guy has leverage.

O’Brien notes that Fox News amplifies the dangerous and damaging garbage that Trump continues to peddle and is the single most influential media platform supporting him.

If Murdoch truly wants to turn the page on Trump, he “could stop allowing some of Fox’s most influential anchors and broadcasters to spew poisonous talking points,” wrote O’Brien.

Tucker Carlson is a good start.

—Kevin McCauley