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O'Dwyer's Newsletter

The Inside News of
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COMSTOCK OUT AT GE

Beth Comstock, former corporate communications chief who rose to become the first female vice chairman slot under Jeff Immelt, is leaving the firm at the end of the year as new CEO John Flannery puts his own stamp on the company.

"Beth's passion for innovation has opened new markets for GE and changed the way we work," CEO John Flannery said. "We have relied on Beth to see around corners and lead us to new ideas and invention.

"Her efforts to push GE into the future have been essential to GE's growth strategy; including identifying the potential of the Industrial Internet and helping transform GE into a digital industrial company."



Beth Comstock

Elected to the vice chair slot in 2015, 57-year-old Comstock leads the business innovations unit, which includes the lighting operation, ventures & licensing, sales, marketing and communications.

Earlier, she was senior VP/president integrated media at NBCUniversal, chief marketing officer at GE and senior VP-corporate communications at NBC.

SKDKNICK DENIES WEINSTEIN WORK

SKDKnickerbocker denies media reports that managing director Anita Dunn, former White House communications director and special advisor to President Obama's presidential campaigns, counseled embattled Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein.

A *New York Times* blockbuster charges Weinstein with sexual harassment of several actresses including Ashley Judd.

Weinstein has threatened to sue the NYT.

SKDKnick issued a statement to say that Dunn "was asked to speak with him by a friend."

It stressed: "Harvey Weinstein and Miramax are not now and have never been clients of our firm or of Anita's."

The firm highlighted its "commitment to defending women's rights" which it said "remains as strong as ever."

Weinstein, who held fundraisers for the presidential campaigns of Obama and Hillary Clinton, is a major donor to potential Democratic White House nominees Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker.

Both are donating Weinstein's cash to charity.



Harvey Weinstein

NONPROFIT SEEKS NATIONAL PR AGENCY

Washington-based childhood hunger organization Share Our Strength has **issued a request for proposal** for a national PR agency partner.

SOS needs an agency to elevate its national "No Kid Hungry" campaign among consumer audiences, The campaign aims to end childhood hunger in America by connecting kids to healthy food programs, educating low-income families regarding nutrition and enlisting the food sector, government and entertainment industry to raise awareness of those efforts.



The hired agency's primary objectives would include securing national media coverage; raising awareness and connecting consumers to the No Kid Hungry campaign as well as developing new ways to help connect people to the brand; event management; influencer engagement; support of cause marketing efforts; press hotline management; and media tracking duties.

Projected timeframe for the engagement spans from January to December 2018, with the objective to extend the campaign beyond those dates. It comes with a total proposed budget of \$180,000.

Proposals are due to by November 3.

WASTEWATER AGENCY WANTS PR SERVICES

Joint Meeting of Essex and Union Counties, a wastewater treatment facility based in Elizabeth, NJ, has **issued a request for qualification** for public relations services.

JMEUC owns and operates Elizabeth's Edward P. Decher Secondary Wastewater Treatment Facility and treats industrial, commercial and residential wastewater for New Jersey's Essex and Union Counties, as well as four additional customer communities in the Garden State.

The agency wants a PR firm that can provide general PR services and deliver key agency messages through a PR campaign via traditional and social media. The hired firm would also be required to prepare a bi-annual newsletter and coordinate JMEUC's social media outlets; conduct media monitoring duties regarding any legislation that could potentially affect JMEUC's operations; help draft amendments and/or legislation as well as testimony preparation for JMEUC's executive director; and attend monthly board meetings as well as NJ Legislature hearings where bills affecting JMEUC are being considered.

Proposals are due by 2 p.m. on Oct 26.



WEBER SHANDWICK UNVEILS VOICEUP

Weber Shandwick is launching VoiceUp video interview series with SellersEaston Media content shop to tell the stories of women executives in a bid to accelerate gender parity in the ranks of top management.

The firm's research shows that visibility of women in executive roles increases the desire of female professionals to become leaders.

Gail Heimann, president of WS, said though there is plenty of discussion about gender imbalance in the C-suite, there aren't enough stories about women who have made it to the top.



Gail Heimann

"This series is an opportunity to lift the profiles of these highly successful women in a way that inspires rising stars to earn their own seats at the table," she said in a statement announcing VoiceUp's launch.

Pattie Sellers is a former assistant managing editor of *Fortune* and executive director of *Fortune's* Most Powerful Women live content at Time Inc.

Nina Easton covered politics, economy and foreign affairs at the *Los Angeles Times* and *Fortune*. She currently chairs *Fortune's* Most Powerful Women International and co-chairs *Fortune Global Forum*.

Weber Shandwick will work with SellersEaston Media to select women for VoiceUp, shape their narratives and amplify their messages.

The Interpublic unit has a solid track record in advocating on behalf of female executives. Its Executive Equity & Engagement practice, which is headed by executive VP Carol Ballock, has counseled more than 125 CEOs and top corporate executives during the past six years.



Sellers (L) & Easton

VERIZON'S MEDIA CHIEF WALDEN TO EXIT

Marni Walden, who heads Verizon's sprawling media and digital operation, is leaving the firm in February.

The 50-year-old, who is Verizon's highest-ranking woman executive, had been mentioned as a potential successor to CEO Lowell McAdam, 63.

"Marni helped build our wireless business, starting as a sales representative in a store and grew into an inspirational leader and role model for so many at Verizon," McAdam said in a statement.

Walden was among executives who advocated on behalf of the \$4.5B acquisition of Yahoo, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Yahoo has now disclosed that its hacking breach is more extensive than it had first thought, affecting 3B of its users.

Walden's duties will be divided among Verizon executives including former AOL CEO Tim Armstrong, who led the integration of Yahoo and AOL to form Oath.



Marni Walden

IS GRIM REAPER AT DOOR OF LOCAL NEWS?

By Rick French, Chmn./CEO of [French|West|Vaughan](#)



Imagine a broadcast landscape where local television and radio studios do not exist; where real time local news is nonexistent. In this world, all "local" news content is managed and produced out of a centralized operation hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away. The reality of that scenario is fast approaching.

On October 24, the **FCC will review a draft order** that would change a nearly 80-year-old rule. The order will:

1) Get rid of the requirement that a television or radio broadcast station utilize a main studio in close proximity to its city of license.

2) Eliminate the requirement that stations have staff members available at that local studio.

If passed, this order would lay the groundwork for large TV and radio conglomerates to get rid of their local news presence in our communities.

The FCC states, "Eliminating the main studio rule will produce substantial benefits. Broadcasters will be able to redirect the significant costs associated with complying the main studio rule to programming, equipment upgrades, newsgathering and other services to the benefit of consumers. Repealing the rule will also encourage the launch of new broadcast stations in small towns and rural areas and help prevent existing stations in those areas from going dark." Huh?

We have seen a dramatic shift in technology over the past 20 years. Newsgathering and corporate consolidations of newspapers, television and radio stations happen daily. While delivery of information is still swift and continuous, we need on-the-ground, well-connected journalists now more than ever to investigate malfeasance and hold the powerful accountable.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2016 five companies (Sinclair, Gray, Nextstar, Tegna and Tribune) owned 37 percent of all full-power local television stations in this country. That consolidation has stretched local news to the limit but it hasn't yet undermined the determination of local news affiliates to produce stellar coverage and content. This FCC order is likely to accelerate layoffs in local television and radio newsrooms across the nation – stretching them to the breaking point.

The importance of local news will take a back seat to the bottom line of these large media companies. With no incentive to keep operations local, program directors and assignment editors will have a difficult time covering breaking news in our communities, instead having to rely on a stable of freelancers as their eyes and ears locally. And the public relations profession, which relies on well-versed local journalists to help tell our stories, will in turn suffer.

This is an issue I encourage everyone in the PR profession to keep a close eye on over the next few months. We are all better served with engaged and dependable news teams in in our markets.

EDELMAN 'EARNS IT'

Edelman CEO Richard Edelman unveiled the firm's new "Earn It" narrative in his Oct. 1 blog to reflect the current "time of uncertainty and interconnectedness" when companies and brands can no longer buy reputation or preference.

The blog marked the 65th anniversary of the shop founded by Dan Edelman. The **biggest independent firm** celebrated its anniversary with events in Chicago and New York.

Clients Earn It via action and peer-to-peer discussion, according to Edelman. The goal is to achieve trusted relationships with consumers, employees, suppliers and investors.

The new mantra is a "further explication of communications marketing, which is the merging of brand and corporate reputation and houses our ambition to be the lead creative partner, aiming for ideas that have impact and are social at the core," wrote Edelman.

Edelman believes the Earn It philosophy captures the firm's entrepreneurial spirit. "It defines how we do business, serving clients first, not shareholders, and recognizing our responsibility to improve society," he wrote.



Richard Edelman

UIS LAUNCHES FIRST AI CLIPPING SERVICE

Universal Information Services has introduced what it says is the world's first press clipping service enhanced with artificial intelligence.

The platform, Alpha Clips, was unveiled by UIS VP Todd Murphy at the 49th World Media Intelligence Congress in Berlin.

"We are excited to offer this new, innovative approach to finding, formatting, clustering, and delivering news coverage," Murphy said at the event. "Alpha Clips is based on the article origins of stories, summarizing articles that would commonly be shared across social networks and online."



Todd Murphy

The Alpha Clip system uses the conventions and formatting of journalism to shorten the length of a story through summarization, while also providing click-through access to the original, full-text content and images from a publisher. The artificial intelligence component of the system extracts key elements of a story. For instance, it knows the importance of a headline and that the first paragraph contains more key elements than subsequent paragraphs.

UIS says the system will offer PR professionals a range of benefits that includes faster access to breaking news across all platforms, streamlined reading time, and immediate sharing within a client's organizational family.

Alpha Clips will be available to a few clients beginning October 22. A complete nationwide rollout is scheduled for Nov. 1.

DAVID JAMES GROUP BUYS BLUE WATER

Oak Brook Terrace, Ill.-based marketing agency David James Group announced that it has acquired boutique shop Blue Water Communications, LLC.

Terms of the acquisition were not publicly disclosed.

Bradenton, Fla.-based Blue Water specializes in PR and marketing with a focus on clients in the performing arts, museum and architecture industries, as well as destination clients.

The PR Boutiques International member firm, which was founded in 2006, maintains a second office in Perrysburg, OH.



Chris Martin

Blue Water will continue to operate under the Blue Water moniker in light of the acquisition. No staff changes will occur, and the agency also maintains its current Bradenton, Fla. headquarters.

Chris Martin, DJG partner and vice president of public relations, told *O'Dwyer's* that the acquisition effectively expands the agency's growth and PR expertise in the nonprofit world.

"We are excited about our future with Blue Water Communications and believe their expertise will continue to help their current and future clients, but DJG's, too," Martin said. "We are bullish on the future of public relations and believe expanding in this area makes a lot of sense for DJG and positions us for future growth."

MOYER JOINS NYU LAW'S 'GREEN' TEAM

Chris Moyer, who served as deputy communications director for California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, has joined NYU Law's State Energy & Environmental Impact Center.

Formed in August, the Center's mission is to assist state attorneys general fight the Trump White House's proposals rolling back climate/environmental protection and fostering clean energy development.

Prior to joining Becerra's team, Moyer worked for the Hillary for America campaign in Ohio, served as communications director for the American Gaming Assn. and spent four years as Senate staffer for Majority Leader Harry Reid and North Carolina's Kay Hagan.

He began his career in the press shop of former Boston Mayor Tom Menino.

David Hayes, ex-deputy secretary of the Dept. of the Interior under Presidents Clinton and Obama, heads the Center, which is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Bruce Babbitt, Clinton's Interior Secretary and former Arizona Governor, sits on the Center's advisory council.



Chris Moyer

Opposition by PRSA members stopped bylaw proposals that would have increased board power to amend bylaws and which would have eliminated district representation on the board.

Pulled just before the Assembly Oct. 7 in Boston was a bylaw requiring a two-thirds majority vote of the Assembly to overturn a board proposal as opposed to the current two-thirds vote of the Assembly needed to adopt a board recommended bylaw.

Three of the board's seven proposals to the Assembly were withdrawn because of member opposition.

The board sank to a new low in blocking information available to members and the press. No reports at all of what went on in the Assembly were posted in either the member areas or non-member areas of the Society's website.

Up until 2006, audio recordings and transcripts of the entire Assembly were placed in the public area of the Society's website.

For the first time in Society history, there was no "press or media room" at the conference. Society policies and practices are a discredit and embarrassment to the industry and the reason it has not grown since 2000 and its revenues are below what they were ten years ago.

New Website Rapped; Membership Dips

The re-engineered PRSA website was criticized by former board member Mary Beth West who said, "I have yet to speak to a PRSA colleague who has had any form of positive user experience" with it.

She noted that membership had dropped to 21,201 as of March 31 vs. 21,905 at the end of 2015. That's a loss of about \$179K in revenues, she noted.

The most controversial board proposal was a bid to replace "PR" with "communications" throughout the bylaws. What happened to that proposal has yet to be revealed.

Judgment of Leadership Questioned

West wrote on her website Aug. 18 that members should "question seriously the intent and judgment of any PRSA national leadership body that would engage in a manner of behavior to expand and leverage its own power at the expense of not only democracy within the Society's governance structure but also our organizational transparency, credibility and brand reputation, both internally and externally."

PRSA's ideal for ethics and professional excellence "drives the core of why people choose membership affiliation — and that ideal is far larger and further rooted



Mary Beth West

than the presence of any specific leader or group of leaders," she said.

"However, when the stewardship of PRSA's brand identity/ideal falls into poor leadership decision-making, the impact is felt by all and poses danger to the foundation of the Society — particularly if left unchecked," she added.

Said West: "The board is appearing to seek . . . quite unabashedly . . . a new role as the near-alpha and omega of Society bylaw creation, interpretation and enforcement, while the PRSA Assembly delegation and members at-large are left completely in the dark as to board goings-on, hidden from prying eyes that would otherwise stand equipped to demand accountability."

Board proposals "fly in the face of multiple Code provisions" that "protect and advance the free flow of accurate and truthful information," she said. West called the governance proposals "more than a bit alarming."

PRSA/NY Joins National in Info Blackout

Since PRSA national barred O'Dwyer reporters from the Assembly, we asked New York chapter leaders if any of the six delegates would cover for us.

Chapter president Olga Gonzales not only refused to allow this, but refused to identify the six delegates even though the chapter website promises their names.

The bylaw proposal to change "PR" to "communications" in "most locations," touched off a furious debate on the Society's website.

"PRSA should be advocating on behalf of public relations," wrote Kay Barkin, MHMR, Fort Worth.

PRSA CCO Laura Kane, answering the critics, said only 13% of members have "PR" in their titles. "We selected the term communications because it is more encompassing than PR."

"The intention of the bylaw," she said, "was to address the importance of digital and social on the profession as it continues to evolve. What has traditionally been defined as PR is now being described as social media, digital communications, content management and influencer marketing among others."

PRSA Should Promote "PR," Says Member

"Wouldn't it be the role of PRSA to help individuals with all these different titles to understand they are part of PR, instead of simply making PR part of communications?" Barkin asks.

Titles that Kane had mentioned in a response to her "would fit neatly under PR in the profession's truest sense as strategies or tactics, and it seems to me PRSA should be advocating on behalf of PR," she added.

Anthony Hicks of SRVS, Memphis, said "Completely eliminating the words PR from the bylaws of a professional assn. with PR in its official name, that is founded and grounded in PR, is a pretty significant move that seems to warrant a compromise."

The reason for the change, wrote Kane, was "to take a forward look at where titles associated with our profession are headed."

— Jack O'Dwyer