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Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



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## FGH MERGES WITH SVC

Finsbury Glover Hering, which is majority-owned by WPP, is merging with [Sard Verbinen & Co.](#) to create a firm they say chalked up \$330M in combined 2020 revenues and will have more than 1,000 staffers in 25 offices throughout the world.



The transaction values the combined group at \$917M and SVC at \$303M. FGH, which had gross assets of \$426.8M at year-end 2020, registered pre-tax profit of \$53.5M.

SVC earned \$36.4M on \$52.2M in gross assets.

Headquartered in New York, FGH CEO Alexander Geiser and COO Sydney Neuhaus will continue as leaders of the combined entity.

SVC co-founder George Sard will join FGH's Roland Rudd and Carter Eskew as co-chairmen.

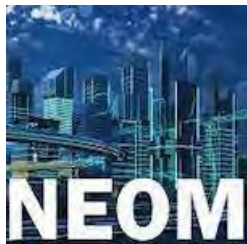
The merger combines two firms with a "heritage of delivering for our clients at their most high-pressure moments," Sard and SVB co-founder Paul Verbinen said in a statement.

It creates a strategic communications powerhouse in government affairs, corporate reputation and crisis management as well as a leader in financial communications with strengths in M&A activity, private equity, IPOs, SPACs, shareholder activism and restructurings.

WPP will own 57.4 percent of FGH-SVC. FGH/SVC managers will control about 40 percent. The transaction is expected to be completed by the end of the year and the company will have a new name in 2022.

## EDELMAN TO PROMOTE SAUDI MEGA-CITY

[Edelman](#) is promoting Saudi Arabia's Neom Co., which is developing a \$500B mega-city in the northwestern part of the kingdom.



[The No. 1 independent PR firm](#) is providing media relations, strategic counsel, stakeholder identification & engagement, content development and media monitoring services.

It has a budget of \$1.3M for a six-month effort that kicked off on Sept. 28.

Neom is the centerpiece of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman's push to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy.

Jere Sullivan, Edelman's vice chairman for global public affairs, heads the Neom push that is supported by DC staffers Jack O'Shea, Debora Comenalli Murray and Tyler Lehner.

## VANDA'S JONES SWITCHES TO STARBUCKS

Vanda Pharmaceuticals' Aranthan (AJ) Jones will join Starbucks on Oct. 25 as senior VP-global communications and public affairs. He also will oversee partner communications, Starbucks Stories, as well as marketing integration & entertainment teams worldwide.



**Aranthan Jones**

At Vanda, Jones was chief corporate affairs and communications officer in charge of PR, IR, government affairs, corporate marketing, ESG and corporate philanthropy.

He has also led policy & communications at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. His Capitol Hill experience includes serving as policy director for Congressional majority whip James Clyburn (D-SC).

## MIAMI BEACH ISSUES PR SERVICES RFP

The Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority is looking for an agency specializing in media outreach, strategic planning, event recruitment, social media promotions and trend tracking to position Miami Beach as a top destination for leisure/group business, cultural events and film production.

Proposals are due by 3 p.m. on November 1. All bidding agencies should submit one original and 10 copies of their proposals, which must be submitted to the following address: Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority; 1701 Meridian Avenue; Suite 403; Miami Beach, Florida 33139

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

## SKDK RECRUITS EN+ GROUP'S AMEND

SKDKnickerbocker has hired Sakura Komiyama Amend as managing director in its New York office. She joined the Stagwell unit from EN+Group, Moscow-based producer of "green" aluminum.

Amend signed on as the first US-based rep for EN+Group after it restructured and was removed from the US Treasury's sanctions list.

Prior to EN+Group, Amend did nine-year stint at Finn Partners and a six years at CBS News.

She has led campaigns for Bloomberg Philanthropies, Peter G. Peterson Foundation and Japan Prize Foundation.



**Sakura Komiyana Amend**

## **COVID DROPS AS CONCERN FOR FINANCE PROS**

COVID is no longer the biggest concern for marketing and communication execs in the financial services sector, according to [a survey from Financial Narrative](#), a network of financial marketers, and strategic insight agency Opinium.

The online survey found that for 30 percent of respondents, “changing the imaging/positioning of our company” was a major driver of marcom efforts this year (down two percent from last year’s survey). But the importance of “pivoting strategies due to COVID” slid much further as a top concern, going from 37 percent in 2020’s study to 28 percent in 2021.

The shift away from focusing mainly on COVID is part of what the survey refers to as “business-as-usual plus”—a term that adds communicating about such areas as brand purpose, social impact and ESG to the mix.

As regards where communicators need to place their focus in the future, several key areas stood out. Trustworthiness, promoting a company’s value proposition, social image initiatives and ESG are seen as likely to increase in importance.

## **PURDUE PHARMA’S LEVY JOINS JPA HEALTH**

[JPA Health](#) has added Danielle Lewis Levy to its newly established New York office as a senior VP in the agency’s life science practice.



**Danielle Lewis Levy**

Most recently, Levy was executive director, corporate communications, and corporate social responsibility at Purdue Pharma.

Earlier, she held executive positions at Finn Partners, GCI Health, Edelman and Cooney Waters.

At JPA, Levy will support the firm’s growth by leveraging her experience in corporate, product and business communications, issues management, corporate

social responsibility and health communications programs.

“Danielle is a highly strategic communications advisor with deep experience providing full spectrum communications support for pharma, biotech and med tech companies,” said JPA Health principal Carrie Jones. “Further, her expertise in corporate social responsibility will be quickly leveraged by our clients.

## **BGR CELEBRATES KAZAKHSTAN/US TIES**

BGR Public Relations inked a contract October 12 to help Kazakhstan celebrate the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties with the US.

Kazakhstan, which was part of the Soviet Union, declared its independence on December 16, 1991 and established ties with the US.

The country renounced its nuclear arsenal, which was the world’s 4th largest, and closed a testing site.

George Washington University’s Central Asia Program and Kazakshstan’s Embassy will hold a virtual conference on December 16 to discuss political, trade, economic, security and cultural ties between the US and Kazakhstan.

BGR’s pact runs through the rest of the year. It receives a \$30K monthly retainer for the work.

Jeff Birnbaum, president of BGR PR, handles the effort. He’s a former *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune* reporter and longtime Fox News Channel contributor.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**Powerhouse Communications** is chosen to lead U.S. media relations efforts for the **Females in Food Community**, an organization committed to advancing women in the food and beverage industry. A female-led agency, Powerhouse Communications will showcase FIF’s 360-approach and impactful tools that make it the most effective resource for women seeking leadership roles with companies that prioritize the needs of females and working mothers. “From my earliest conversations with Powerhouse, it was evident the team really understood our mission,” said Angela Dodd, founder of the Females in Food Community.



**Evins Communications** is working with **Innovative Spa Management** as public relations agency of record for an upcoming brand expansion of the company’s Privai skincare line. Evins will implement a robust marketing communications strategy encompassing media relations, social media strategy, influencer engagement, strategic partnerships and brand communications positioning to elevate and differentiate the brand and businesses’ distinct approach to delivering wellness experiences.

**Eleven Six PR** signs on to handle the openings of Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta and Hyatt Centric Charlotte SouthPark. The agency’s work for the properties will include media relations, press trip planning and execution, social media management, including influencer marketing, creative ideation and relevant partnerships. Eleven Six has also been hired to raise awareness for NYC-based event planning company Events by Jessie and to introduce Stay One Degree, which connects travelers directly with the owners of luxury vacation homes, to the U.S. market. The accounts are supported by Eleven Six PR’s New York and Dallas teams.

**Peaks Strategies** is named agency of record for Ready Capital, a multi-strategy real estate finance company. Peaks Strategies is providing content strategy, media and social media execution, and thought leadership strategies to the company. Ready Capital has provided over \$3 billion in capital nationwide, lending up to \$45 million on multifamily and commercial real estate.



**Lou Hammond Group** adds **Jukes Cordialities**, **Cabarrus County Convention and Visitors Bureau**, **The Carlton Tower Jumeirah** and **SquareMouth** to its client roster. LHG will be providing public relations/corporate communications, strategic planning, branding and digital marketing for all four clients. Jukes Cordialities is a line of non-alcoholic beverages. The Cabarrus County Convention and Visitors Bureau promotes the North Carolina county. The Carlton Tower Jumeirah is in London’s Knightsbridge neighborhood. SquareMouth is a travel insurance comparison site.

**Colangelo & Partners** is selected as agency of record for Italian winery **Donnachiara**. The agency will be tasked with developing and executing a comprehensive communications strategy intended to grow and leverage Donnachiara’s brand awareness in the US market. Targeted to key media, trade and consumers, the partnership will include strategic media relations and events.



## HEALTHCARE'S COMING OPPORTUNITIES

Innovation is often the unintended consequence of a situation we find ourselves in during a period of significant change. Like the COVID-19 era.



**Michael Roth, Bob Pearson**

In response to the pandemic, the healthcare industry pivoted to re-shape how we think about health and wellness. We only need to look as far as the normalization of tele-medicine as an example

of how far we have come. Entire medical practices and live treatment paradigms, like psychiatry, shifted to virtual.

Heading into 2022, the industry will be breathtaking, frustrating and inspiring as we collaborate in new ways to promote access, understand social determinants of health and work to bring the latest advances and innovations to consumers.

Our communications industry is also being reshaped due to the massive shifts in technology applications and consumers' full embrace of digital solutions. We believe the answer is to stay one step ahead via analytics and technology, to create new media models that both protect and promote our clients.

Here are five key trends that represent new models for the years ahead.

**Planning for the “new age of reputation.”** Companies, communities, citizens and countries are under relentless attack from bad actors, ranging from ransomware to disinformation to counterfeiting of products and services. To build the best reputation for a leading company, we must become experts in both protecting ourselves in the cyberworld and telling the positive story of those same companies in the mainstream world.

**Shifting to a disease-based media planning model.** Why continue to build traditional media plans when we can utilize algorithms to create disease-based media models that offer targeted precision? Imagine creating a media planning model for a disease that shows us which towns are most important, as well as which influencers, channels, words and content matter to reach patients with important health information. Today, a communications firm can deliver a more accurate model that leverages the best of earned, shared, owned and paid media. We all need to swim in this direction.

In our work with Johns Hopkins supporting two clinical trials related to COVID-19 and convalescent plasma, it's this level of precision that has been key to nearly completing enrollment in both trials during a time of incredible “noise” in the market. We can figure out exactly who to reach in Houston, for example, by geo-location, media channel and time of day. This type of knowledge completely changes how we plan our media efforts, whether earned, shared or paid.

**Building “search media relations.”** Search engines (mainly Google) are the largest and most untapped media platform on earth. Approximately one-third of the digital advertising spend worldwide goes to Google. We search for answers all day long, particularly when we're in need of important information.

Did you ever wonder if the people who have the most influence in media have the same sway in search? Turns out that it's not quite the same. We can use analytics to identify which people, organizations and content are prioritized by search vs. what we hear via media coverage. Through analytics, we can

identify a new group of people to reach out to for briefings.

Imagine having a Venn diagram on your desk that shows the most influential people in the physical world, the most influential in shared media and the most influential in search. That's a future media grid worth spending time on.

**Unlocking historical data to find new insights.** Ever wonder how you can analyze an entire disease area in seconds? We have, which is why our team-built queries that empower us to look at five to 10 years of publications and trials for a specific disease and quickly see which investigators are trending in importance, which medical centers are doing the same, how clinical trial design is evolving and more. We take in this data to identify who the best spokespeople and advisors may be, as well as who to follow and learn from.

**Storytizing is replacing coverage.** It's important to get great coverage of our clients' stories. It's more important to ensure the audience they want to reach hear that same story. And this requires expertise in understanding their audience ecosystem and how it works. We're continually developing new audience architecture techniques that show us how the audience interrelates, so we can see who has influence, who to follow, where to share content and when utilizing paid media, how to ensure our story is arriving at the right virtual doors at the right time.

We're taking a story and ensuring it's being delivered effectively, which we think of as “Storytizing.”

The good news is that advances in technology are making it possible for our teams to innovate at an unprecedented pace, all with the spirit that our models may improve health-care for the patients and providers we all serve together.

That's plenty of motivation for us.

*Michael Roth is Managing Partner and Owner of The Bliss Group. Bob Pearson is CEO of The Bliss Group and Chair of The Next Practice.*

## PLANK CENTER HONORS PR MENTORS

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama will honor five PR leaders at its annual [Milestones in Mentoring Gala](#), taking place at the Union League Club of Chicago on Thursday, Nov. 11 at 6 p.m.

The Milestones in Mentoring Awards recognize leaders in the profession for their dedication to mentorship, ethical leadership and the advancement of DEI. This year five awards are being presented.

The Jack Kotten Corporate Award, which honors an individual who has demonstrated a commitment to mentoring others, will go to Nineteen88 Strategies founder & CEO David Albritton.



Dr. Jinx Coleman Broussard, a professor and scholar at the LSU Manship School of Mass Communication, is the recipient of the Bruce K. Berger Educator Award. The Emerging Leader Award will go to Ketchum senior manager, business development Myreete Stanforth, and Tom Martin, executive-in-residence at The College of Charleston, will receive the Legacy Award. The Agency Award, which recognizes outstanding mentors in an agency setting or consulting role, is being given to Zeno Group CEO Barby K. Siegel.

From 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Nov. 11, the center will present its 2021 DEI Summit at the Union League Club. The summit provides a forum for practitioners, educators and students to come together to forge a deeper immersion into DEI.

## MISSISSIPPI NEEDS HIV/AIDS OUTREACH

Mississippi wants a PR firm to partner with its health department to promote its efforts to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in The Magnolia State.

The firm will spotlight the “Put Your Foot Down Mississippi” campaign designed to destigmatize HIV/AIDS, stop its spread and increase awareness.



It will “inspire all Mississippians to create a stronger and healthier future by increasing public understanding of rapid HIV testing and how to access needed services,” according to the RFP.

The State wants to complement traditional media outreach with an aggressive social media thrust, as well as podcasts, videos, apps and e-cards to empower

people to make smarter health decisions in their lives.

The communications partner will reinforce and personalize messages targeted to LGBTQ people, college/middle school students, parents, seniors, minority/ethnic populations and faith-based groups.

Responses are due Oct. 26. They may be sent to: Toni Johnson, Mississippi Dept. of Mental Health, 239 North Lamar St., Jackson, MS 39201, or emailed to [toni.johnson@dmh.ms.gov](mailto:toni.johnson@dmh.ms.gov).

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

## IGNITION FUELS INCLUSIVITY AT STELLANTIS

Ignition Media Group is engaged by Stellantis, which was formed by the merger of Fiat Chrysler and PSA Group, to serve as “a sounding board and multicultural thought partner.” The Detroit-based, minority-owned agency is tasked with helping to shape and fortify Stellantis’ media and marketing strategies, focusing on the company’s North America brands, including Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Dodge, FIAT, Jeep and Ram.

“The addition of Ignition Media Group to our strategic marketing partner roster will help us provide a smarter, more comprehensive and cohesive approach to our media and marketing strategies,” said Stellantis North America vice president of marketing Marissa Hunter, adding that the partnership will ensure that the company is “both audience aware and culturally inclusive” across its brand portfolio.

## BRUNSWICK RECRUITS DELOITTE’S DE JONGH

Brunswick has hired Robert de Jongh, managing director of digital and strategic transformations at Deloitte, as a partner in its business & society practice group in DC.



**Robert de Jongh**

He joined Brunswick Oct. 18 after eight years at Deloitte, where he established its social impact practice.

Prior to Deloitte, de Jongh was senior impact advisory at the Asian Development Bank. He also handled impact investing activity at the Inter-American Development Bank and the Ford Foundation.

Earlier in his more than 30-year career, de Jongh did stints as Central America director at the Nature Conservancy and Latin American chief for the World World Life Fund.

## I. CONSULTANT: 10 LESSONS LEARNED

In October 2019 I left my long-time job as a senior vice president at a global public relations firm to become a full-time PR consultant. I’d paid my dues at agencies small, medium-sized and large for 28 years. The time had come to go solo.

Five months later, the pandemic hit. Talk about a launch well-timed.

As it happens, going into business for myself has turned out to be easier than I expected. It’s also proven to be much harder. What’s gone right and what’s gone wrong? Here are 10 key lessons picked up so far:



**Bob Brody**

**1. You’re truly on your own.** Forget about enlisting your social media go-to in Minneapolis or your crisis management whiz in Milan. All the responsibility is yours alone.

**2. You always deal directly with clients.** No longer does your finely nuanced counsel have to be filtered through a pipeline, only to get lost in translation, or shoehorned into a conference call with your 10-member team.

**3. You choose which prospects to pursue.** Nobody can force you to represent a South American dictator anymore. Hallelujah! You can take on whichever sectors you feel equipped to serve.

**4. You control your marketing strategy.** Go ahead, network however you wish, through whichever channels you deem suitable. Define yourself based on your background, specialties, whims and idiosyncrasies.

**5. You can drop clients.** Yes, withdrawing your services from a client whose checks routinely clear is regarded as the highest heresy. But maybe the swooning honeymoon period ended earlier than anticipated. Weigh, in the context of your portfolio, whether or not a client sucks up too much oxygen.

**6. You can deliver freebies.** Investing in any pro bono, least of all for too long, is often taboo. But you have to make long-term ROI your priority.

**7. You decide how service is delivered.** You can make every client feel like your only client, or at least your top client. Any time a client asks for anything, your standard response—said with the utmost sincerity—can be “At your service.”

**8. You should embrace your anxieties.** Going solo is definitely a gamble. You’re daring to establish a thriving practice from scratch. Here’s my theory: feeling vulnerable can ultimately build strength.

**9. You should brim with confidence.** You’re highly seasoned. You’ve finally achieved a hard-earned expertise. You also discover, much to your surprise, that you’ve somehow developed that special something we call a good reputation.

**10. You can finally be you.** Never again need you try to be the square peg wedged into a round hole. For example, I still practice earned media relations. But now, I’ve expanded my focus on helping clients publish op-eds and personal essays.

Two years in, business is good. I feel lucky. And what’s worked for me just might work for you, too.

*Bob Brody is a PR consultant and veteran of Weber Shandwick, Ogilvy and Rubenstein. He is also the author of *Playing Catch with Strangers: A Family Guy (Reluctantly) Comes Of Age* and an essayist who contributes to the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and the Washington Post.*

## **OGILVY BOOSTS FEMA TIES WITH \$250M PUSH**

Ogilvy has strengthened its longtime relationship with the Federal Emergency Management Agency as the WPP unit picks up \$250M in fresh funding for the Resilience Action



**Michael Baker**  
INTERNATIONAL

Partners communications push via a joint venture Michael Baker International.

The goal of FEMA's community engagement and risk communication program is to support efforts to change the way communities understand and think about disaster risks and encourage them to take actions to bolster their resilience to natural disasters.

The WPP unit's CERC team includes staffers in 20 cities involved in PR, advertising, healthcare, growth & innovation and behavioral science.

Housed in Washington, the effort is led by Lisa Miller, senior VP & CERC program director; and Meg Bartow, executive VP for resilience & social impact and CERC executive sponsor.

The Resilience Action Partners program launched in 2015.

## **ITALY TABS PROJECT ASSOCS. FOR DIGITAL**

Italy's mission to the United Nations has hired Project Associates for a campaign to leverage its events and content on digital platforms to increase its social media following as well as raise awareness and promote the image of Italy at the UN and to a global audience.



Permanent Mission of Italy  
to the United Nations

Project Assocs. will concentrate on growing the following, reach and engagement rates of the official social media accounts of the Mission with a particular focus on the Twitter channel, @ItalyUN\_NY, which has 22.6K followers.

Under the eight-month contract that began Sept. 7, Project Assocs. is to audit the Mission's existing social media standing, draw up a strategic framework for a digital promotion strategy in conjunction with the Mission's press office, develop a content creation schedule, execute outreach, and monitor daily social media activity.

Italy's UN ambassador Maurizio Massari inked the contract with Project Assocs.

## **LEUNG TAKES TENEO POST**

Elsie Leung, who has extensive corporate PR experience, has joined Teneo as managing director in Hong Kong.



**Elsie Leung**

She has worked in Hong Kong for Golin (executive VP-corporate & PA), [Ruder Finn](#) (deputy gm) and [APCO Worldwide](#) (senior consultant).

Most recently, Leung was communications director at the Our Hong Kong Foundation, think tank founded by Hong Kong's first CEO Tung Chee-hwa, who went on to the vice chairman position at the Beijing's Chinese People Political Consultative Conference.

Leung played a key communications role in the controversial third-runway project to expand Hong Kong's International Airport.

Under construction for the past five years, the new runway will open in 2022 and double the capacity of HKIA.

## **GAGNIER PUNCHES SEATGEEK'S SPAC TICKET**

Gagnier Communications handles SeatGeek, online live entertainment ticketing company, as it goes public via a \$1.4B SPAC merger with RedBall Acquisition.

SeatGeek is the exclusive ticketing platform for the Brooklyn Nets (Barclays Center), Cleveland Cavaliers (Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse), Dallas Cowboys (AT&T Stadium), Liverpool FC as well as theaters on Broadway and London's West End.

RedBall has more than \$5B invested in sports, media and ticketing entities such as YES Network, Fenway Sports Group, XFL, Toulouse FC and On Location Experiences.

SeatGeek CEO Jack Groetzinger said RedBall Capital's experiences and relationships in the sports, entertainment and ticketing categories make it the ideal partner.

Gagnier Communications' Dan Gagnier, Jeff Mathews (managing partner), Lindsay Barber (VP) and Margaret Joel (associate), working on the deal for SeatGeek.

## **CORNERSTONE HIRES CLEVELAND CLINIC ALUM**

Cornerstone Government Affairs has added Carlos Jackson, who has more than 20 years of experience in forging relationships between healthcare organizations and policymakers.

Jackson joins the DC-based firm from America's Essential Hospitals, where he was VP-legislative affairs

Earlier, Jackson was executive director of government relations at the Cleveland Clinic's Health System.

He guided advocacy programs at the state and federal levels and was Cleveland Clinic's interface with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Dept. of Health and Human Services.

Jackson also did lobbying and government stints at the American Hospital Assn. and American Nurses Assn.



**Carlos Jackson**

## **NEWS OF FIRMS**

**August**, a strategic communications advisory firm led by former Sard Verbinnen managing director and Finsbury partner Steven Goldberg, launches. The firm's core practice areas include crisis management; financial restructurings and Chapter 11 cases; blockchain, digital assets and fintech; discrimination, bias and diversity; and corporate positioning and reputation management. Based in Los Angeles and New York, the firm has capabilities to serve clients across North America and plans to establish a presence in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area in 2022. August's executive team also includes SVB managing director and former chief public information officer for the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York Ellen Davis.

**Edelman Global Advisory**, which provides business and government advisory services, launches its International Advisory Board. Inaugural members of the board include former Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter, former UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova and Carolina Barco, who served as minister of foreign affairs for Colombia. The board will provide advice and counsel to the newly formed EGA business. "Each of the advisory board members brings a track record of success in their individual fields," said EGA chief executive officer Deborah Lehr.



# COMMENTARY

**Moderna is fed up with sensational headlines that are at odds with the facts**, complained chairman Nour Afeyan Venice in a letter to the *New York Times*.

He was referring to the Times' article of Oct. 9 that carried the headline "[Moderna, Racing for Profits, Keeps COVID Vaccine Out of Reach of Poor.](#)" Ouch.

Moderna issued an empty Oct. 7 press release announcing a plan to invest \$500M to build a "state-of-the-art" facility somewhere on the continent of Africa.

On Oct. 12, the company published another release, touting the sale of 176.5M doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, at its "lowest-tiered price." The doses are bound for low-income countries.

Moderna's PR misfires are puzzling.

The company has gone on a PR hiring spree since it broke into the COVID-19 vaccine business.

Ray Jordan, a veteran of Amgen, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer, joined Moderna on June 15, 2020 as chief corporate affairs officer. John Lepore, who was in charge of policy and advocacy at MasterCard, was hired on Aug. 12, 2020 as senior VP-government engagement. Ogilvy Health chief Kate Cronin became chief brand officer on July 12, 2021.

They should be a crackerjack team.

Moderna earned \$4B on \$6.3B sales during the first half of this year. That outsized profit is sure to trigger more PR backlash about the sketchy distribution of its COVID-19 vaccine.

**The Food and Drug Administration assumed something of a defensive crouch** in granting on Oct. 12 its first-ever marketing authorization for an e-cigarette, R.J. Reynolds Vapor Company's Vuse Solo tobacco-flavored product.

In the FDA's view, Vuse Solo is less harmful than smoking cigarettes. That's walking a very fine line. Anti-tobacco activists blasted the FDA authorization.

In granting marketing authorization, the FDA said it considered the risks and benefits to the general population, including young people.

The FDA said young people use fruit, candy and mint-flavored products, rather than tobacco-flavored, and it did issue "marketing denial orders" for five RJR flavors that it no longer markets. It threatens to yank Vapor Solo's authorization if it finds that its marketing results in "a significant increase in youth initiation."

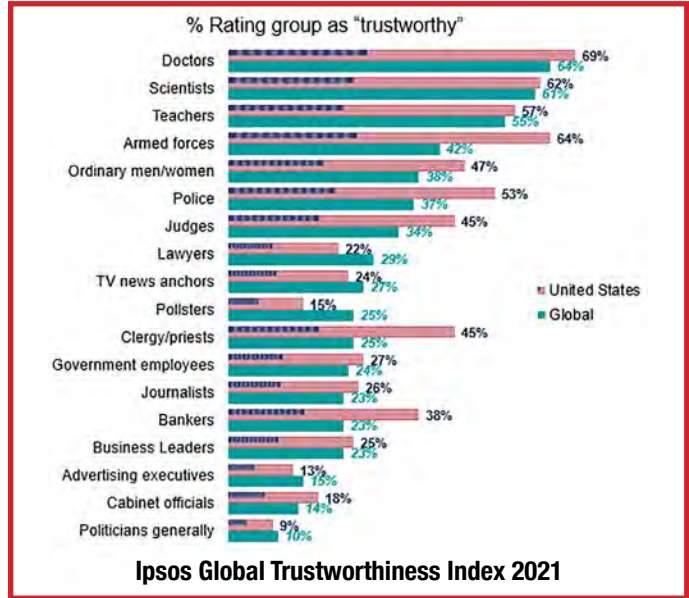
The FDA is still reviewing three RJR e-cigarettes that the company says share the "foundational science" of Vuse Solo and is confident in the quality of their applications.

RJR may have more PR victories ahead at the FDA's expense.

**The advertising business is desperate for a PR makeover**, according to an Ipsos poll on trustworthiness released Oct. 12. Of the 18 groups measured by Ipsos, Americans said only politicians (nine percent) are less trustworthy than ad people (13 percent).

Doctors (69 percent), armed forces (64 percent) and scientists (62 percent) are the three most trusted groups.

The poll found some big trustworthy gaps between Americans and the rest of the world. Though America loves its



soldiers, the military is trusted by only 42 percent by the rest of the world. Priests/clergy get a 45 percent trustworthy score here and only 25 percent elsewhere.

Americans give bankers a 38 percent trust score, while they are trusted by only 23 percent of people outside the US.

Ipsos did not rank PR people, who undoubtedly would have rivaled doctors in the trust category.

**Biding away too much time...** Joe Biden better find his PR pulse because his approval rating is sinking into Trump-Land territory as the days of Democratic control of the Congress dwindle away.

Pew Research shows that Biden's \$1.2T infrastructure bill and \$3.5T economic package enjoy 2-to-1 national support, but the president's approval rating has dropped from 52.7 percent in June to 44.5 percent, according to FiveThirtyEight.

The public watches as Biden suffers potshots from the progressive wing of the Democratic party, who view any reduction in the size of the Build Back Better plan as a defeat.

*Wall Street Journal* columnist Gerry Steib says Biden is on the cusp of achieving "perhaps the most significant one-year increase in spending on domestic programs since the Great Depression."

That hike depends on his willingness to scale back the Build Back Better plan to spending of about \$1.9T and infrastructure to \$1T in order to win a thumbs-up in the Senate.

Those numbers combined with the \$1.9T COVID-19 relief and stimulus plan approved in March, would drive total spending near the \$5T mark. That's five times the funding that Barack Obama gained during the 2008 financial crisis.

Biden needs to play up the historic nature of his downsized spending plan to counter the negative spin by progressives.

He should give his messaging guru Anita Dunn of SKD-Knickerbocker a call and then get to work snatching a victory from the jaws of political embarrassment and possible defeat.

—Kevin McCauley