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DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Advice for the First George Floyd Anniversary: Communicate Authentically and with Purpose

The one-year anniversary of George Floyd's killing occurs three weeks from today (May 25, 2021). In anticipation, communicators are pondering several scenarios. Below is a paraphrased collection of some we heard:

- ▶ 'Should my company, which responded with social media support for Floyd and #BLM one year ago, mark the anniversary date? If so, what should we say or do?'
- ▶ 'We want to mark the anniversary, sure, but we also want to communicate our continuing DEI commitment. Since last summer we've published diversity goals and released data about our journey. We've added diverse board members, leaders and employees and appointed a head of DEI. We think we've done a lot, but we want to communicate authentically and without seeming opportunistic. How do we do it?'

Certainly, there are other questions.

- ▶ 'Our company was vocal last summer and we sent a large check to a social justice organization in June. But we've not done much since then to reform our hiring

practices. And our leadership and board aren't very ethnically diverse. We continue to support legislators who vote against measures promoting diversity and in favor of acts that seem to promote structural racism. How transparent should we be on May 25? Should we admit that we have work to do or remain silent? Do we do this internally only or send external messages too?'

- ▶ 'Our company hasn't done much on DEI or #BLM. We stayed out of it. But, we realize now we need to. Should we mark the anniversary and risk getting called out for doing nothing until now?'
- ▶ 'I'm worried that there'll be a consumer reckoning on May 25. Like nearly everyone else, our company supported #BLM in 2020 with social posts and sent a check. We've made progress on diverse hiring since last summer, but the pandemic slowed our hiring. We had a hiring freeze. If we mark the anniversary, will social media say we haven't done enough? I think we could be in trouble.'

And then there are companies like **Amazon**, whose activities around DEI and #BLM seem rife with contradictions.

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UPCOMING EVENTS AND DEADLINES*

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**PLATINUM PR
AWARDS DEADLINE
JULY 16, 2021**

**CSR AND DIVERSITY
AWARDS DEADLINE
SEPTEMBER 17, 2021**

Continued from page 1

For example, the online giant promptly [post-ed support](#) of #BLM on its site last summer after Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were killed (see [tweet below](#)). In addition, an early June 2020 post noted Amazon’s [donation of \\$10 million to “organizations supporting justice and equity.”](#)

The money was part of [big tech’s \\$1 billion+ pledge](#) to racial justice in 2020, a year that saw many in the sector bank record profits.



Confusing: Amazon quickly supported #BLM, but its actions seemed to back systemic racism.

Later that month, Amazon’s then-CEO Jeff Bezos [sent a note](#) to employees urging them to observe [Juneteenth](#). In the missive, the planet’s richest man revealed he’d been “thinking” about systemic racism. He felt strongly enough to clear his calendar on Juneteenth. “I encourage you to do the same if you can,” he wrote to Amazon employees.

Bezos received hate mail on social for his pro-#BLM stance. He was happy to lose such people as Amazon customers, he said.

On the other hand, some companies, such as [Nike](#) and [Target](#), made Juneteenth a paid holiday. Amazon did not.

For most of Amazon’s Black employees, about 25 percent of its US staff, Juneteenth was just another day of work for an hourly wage, [the NY Times reported](#). The Times’ story portrayed several Black employees saying Bezos could honor Juneteenth more effectively by paying workers a better wage and improving working conditions.

The paper’s June 24, 2020, story also noted Bezos’ senior leadership team of 22 lacked Black executives. [Two months later, Bezos [add-ed one.](#)]

In addition, later in the year Amazon urged shareholders to vote against [proposals for transparency on racial and gender pay](#) inequities.

Moreover, the company worked hard to defeat unionizing an Amazon facility last month.

Such actions seem to smack of preserving systemic racism, critics contend.

POLITICS AND MORE COMPLICATIONS

Complicating all this, of course, is politics.

Possible issues for companies around May 25 include [voting rights legislation](#) and whether or not they’ve spoken out about it and [how quickly](#). Some see aspects of these state laws as maintaining systemic racism.

Meanwhile there are issues of [cancel culture](#) and wokeness, which are outside the scope of this story, but important aspects of it.

For example, [a study](#) of 1,000 consumers from [Savings.com](#) shows:

* Consumers are 50 percent more likely to boycott a company now due to its political positions than they were last year; and

* In 2020, 1 in 4 American consumers (50 million+) stopped purchasing from a company owing to its support of a presidential candidate.

Things got to a point where Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell warned companies to exit the arena and [leave politics to politicians](#). Federal and state legislators [mentioned punishing](#) so-called ‘woke’ companies for their stances.

While PR pros we spoke with about May 25 offered plenty of advice, their tone largely was positive. The takeaways:

- ▶ It’s not too late for a company to begin its diversity commitment, provided it’s undertaken honestly and encompasses demonstrable change.

As [FINN Partners’](#) DEI chief Helen Shelton notes, “This is a 400 year-old issue.”

So, while she gives props to companies that moved early and authentically on DEI, Shelton says racial equity is a lengthy process, “not a day trip.” Communicators, she says, should convey the idea that May 25 is “just the beginning.”



Helen Shelton
Chief Diversity Officer
FINN Partners



John Saunders
President/CEO
Fleishman Hillard

[FleishmanHillard](#) chief John Saunders agrees. “This isn’t about one day,” he says.

On the other hand, Shelton says, DEI is not optional. “Companies *have* to take a stand... because George Floyd’s murder laid bare a diabolical phenom-

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Out of Touch: The Super League and Hollywood Foreign Press Association

Increasingly, we are seeing a refreshing trend from major brands and corporations in that they actually listen to their consumers, employees and potential recruits. As a result, big-name brands are taking stands (and, in some cases, actions) on social issues like climate change and voting rights.

Chances are pretty good that these major brands have done their research and surveyed stakeholders, so they know that the best and brightest talent doesn't want to work with a company that is on the wrong side of history when it comes to diversity, climate change, LGBTQ rights, voting rights, etc. And increasingly, investors are taking a pass on investments that have low ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) scores, mostly because they've seen the correlation between ESG scores and high stock prices.

Sadly, there are a number of organizations that clearly are not in tune with their constituencies. They're out of touch with the people who give them money and support. The most obvious recent example is the **European Super League**, which went from a press release to dissolution in four tumultuous days last month.

It took longer for *all* the problems plaguing the **Hollywood Foreign Press Association** (HFPA) and its signature awards, the Golden Globes, to emerge. But both PR disasters resulted from being totally out of touch with stakeholders.

THE EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE

The announcement that many of the top European football clubs were creating a 'Super League' (ESL) led the late-night news April 18. Essentially, a group of club owners decided to create a version of the **National Football League** (NFL), in which only an elite group of teams could play. Their goal was selling broadcast rights for millions.

Allegedly, the plan was hatched to generate more revenue for the teams—many of which were hurting financially after a year of COVID-19 restrictions. It might have worked if: 1. Club owners had done more research ahead of time and 2. This bunch of rich dudes had the good sense to hire a communication team promptly, instead of leaving that detail until the day before the announcement.

What was worse is that the communicators it hired were known for their political skills, not their expertise in sports. Instead, the owners went for high-profile PR pros who helped former prime minister Theresa May and current PM Boris Johnson get elected. It didn't help, nor did the fact that Johnson **came out against the League**. So, the media got a press release, but no one to answer questions.

For Americans, it may have seemed like a tempest in a very small English teapot. In Europe, though, the reaction was an unprecedented level of rage and outcry that made the reaction to Colin Kaepernick's kneeling look like silence. Worse, apparently none of the League organizers expected the response—no doubt because they hadn't done any research on how soccer fans might react.

DISRUPTING TRADITION

The first problem was that the move went against the core framework of European football tradition, which uses performance statistics to determine who gets to play in the elite **Champions League** each year. That allows teams to move up or down yearly, depending on their performance. (Just **watch "Ted Lasso"** and it will make sense.) The other problem was that it was seen as nothing more than a scheme to make wealthy clubs and their owners richer. Not a popular notion in COVID-19-induced recessionary times.

UEFA, the governing body of European football, threatened to ban all clubs that joined the ESL. Prime ministers and other government officials weighed in and then, to the surprise of no one except the Super League itself, fans took to the streets with an outpouring of unprecedented rage.

April 21, just a few days after the League's announcement, the six teams that originally agreed to join dropped out. In addition, **JPMorgan Chase**, which pledged \$4 billion to fund the scheme, **apologized for its role**.

A lesson to rich and powerful types who dream up crazy ideas over drinks on a weekend: Do your research. Listen

Continued on page 4



PRNEWS PRESENTS

TOP WOMEN IN PR AWARDS

ENTRY DEADLINE: MAY 7 | LATE DEADLINE: MAY 14

If you know a woman leader who fights for their voice to be heard, navigates a team through a crisis with poise and inspires others to work smarter, they belong on the 2021 Top Women in PR list.

- ◆ CHANGEMAKER
- ◆ ENTREPRENEUR
- ◆ INDUSTRY INNOVATOR
- ◆ MENTOR
- ◆ RISING STAR

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to stakeholders and *then* hire a PR team to develop a strategy for your announcement. Once that plan is executed, go ahead and launch.

HFPA AND THE GOLDEN GLOBES

In many ways, HFPA had the opposite problem; rather than launching something, this tiny group did things the same way for so long it had little idea what change looks like.

For years, HFPA and the Golden Globes [were criticized](#) for a lack of diversity in its membership, nominees and award winners. There were questions about members' credentials as journalism and HFPA expenditures were scrutinized. Considered an open-secret in Hollywood circles, details of HFPA's lack of diversity and the Globes, its money-making boondoggle, became public knowledge when the **LA Times** did an [exposé](#) in February 2021.

The story revealed a non-profit that takes in \$27.5 million from **NBC** for the Globes broadcast and spends it on perks and compensation for committee members. This information and lawsuits reinforced the perception that HFPA members accept money and gifts from studios and producers in exchange for votes and nominations.

All of which was background to this year's ceremony, which, as usual, overlooked many directors and actors of

color, so much so that hosts Tina Fey and Amy Poehler addressed the it in their opening monologue.

"Look, a lot of flashy garbage got nominated, but that happens. That's, like, their thing," Poehler quipped. "But a number of Black actors and Black-led projects were overlooked," she added.

The HFPA's problems didn't end with the Globes. As if to confirm everyone's worst fears, an email to members from [former HFPA president Phil Berk](#) called **Black Lives Matter** (BLM) a "racist hate movement" and BLM co-founder, Partrisse Khan-Cullers, "a self-proclaimed trained Marxist."

While HFPA continues to attempt to distance itself from its past by [unveiling reforms \(at our press time, May 3\)](#), ratings for the 2021 Globes' fell to their lowest level. Speaking of distancing, NBC is trying to do that too, as it see HFPA's poor behavior as a liability. Even **Dick Clark Productions**, which has produced the Globes show for years, called for immediate action. A newly hired [diversity advisor exited](#) and 100+ PR firms threatened to cut HFPA's ties to Hollywood stars they represent unless HFPA reforms. Throughout it all, HFPA's stream of denials and habit of hiding behind legal statement made matters worse. ■

CONTACT: kdaine@paine-publishing.com

European Super League

| Criteria | Grade | Comments | Advice |
|---------------------------------|-------|--|---|
| Extent of coverage | F | You know when BBC announcers are hyperventilating that it's big news. News of the European Super League (ESL) ricocheted around the world in hours, generating some 43.7 million mentions on Google. | Getting attention these days is pretty easy. Just combine a beloved sport, some big celebrities, lots of money and news that will infuriate everyone but those making money off whatever it is you're announcing. What you need a good PR team for is to generate the kind of attention that might help you achieve your goals. |
| Effectiveness of spokespeople | F | Every statement from the ESL organizers dripped arrogance and greed. Nowhere was there any understanding of the implications to anyone else but them. | Effective spokespeople need to look like and sound like the people they are trying to reach. Just because someone has lots of money and power doesn't mean he/she has credibility. |
| Communication of key messages | F | The only message seemed to be 'We're doing this!' If you hire a PR team the day of an announcement, crafting clear key messages is impossible. As a result, the media and your opposition will fill in the vacuum with their messages. | When announcing something controversial, get your ducks in a row, make sure you understand target audiences and what gets them riled up. Also, allow enough time to figure out and TEST possible responses. If not, media coverage will be filled with whatever your enemies are saying. |
| Management of negative messages | F | Nature, and the media, abhor a vacuum. In ESL's case, that's what the lack of communication planning provided. So, all the ESL's messages were about money and greed, and nothing about fans. | Even with a surprise announcement, the opposition can craft messages quickly. Count on the media to write mostly about your lack of planning and preparation. |
| Impact on stakeholders | F | Fans immediately took to Twitter to fume about the announcement. Soon the media was filled with pictures of thousands of angry fans. Even after the League collapsed, fans weren't forgiving or forgetting. | Just because you back down from a bad decision or drop an unpopular initiative doesn't mean that your stakeholders or the media will forget the incident. They will hang on to the grudge. Media will bring it up every time the leader of that initiative does anything else. |
| Impact on investors | D | JPMorgan got out in one piece, but is unlikely to be receptive to future pitches involving sports projects. | If what you're announcing is all about money and you have a big bank showering you with billions and STILL fail miserably, no one is going to be very sympathetic, including future investors. |
| Overall Score | F | Already in line for the worst PR disaster of the year—and some say of the decade. | If you're announcing something that is going to shake up an industry, do your homework and research, have data at your fingertips, start communication planning months in advance, and you'll have a better chance of succeeding. |

Hollywood Foreign Press Association

| Criteria | Grade | Comments | Advice |
|---------------------------------|-------|--|---|
| Extent of coverage | D | While it wasn't necessarily front-page news, every entertainment media outlet wrote something about either the Globes' lack of diversity and weirdness of its nominees and/or winners, the bad TV ratings or the racism of HFPA's former president. As a result, if you Google 'Golden Globes news,' all you see is negative press and related coverage . | Once you're perceived as being 'in trouble,' the media will reinforce that message until you take dramatic action to correct whatever cultural or organizational issues caused the problem(s). |
| Effectiveness of spokespeople | F | What spokespeople? There really doesn't seem to be a single voice or point of contact. VP Helen Hoehne was quoted most frequently, but it's clear she didn't have a message that meant anything or was credible enough to break through. | If you don't have a designated spokesperson to answer media queries, reporters will find the answers wherever they can. The spokesperson should be the most authentic, credible and knowledgeable person in your organization; whomever can articulate your messages best will be your strongest bet. |
| Communication of key messages | F | 'We didn't break the law' and 'We're working on it' seem to be HFPA's only major messages. | The more you hide behind legalese or make empty promises, the longer your negative coverage will persist. Act quickly or prepare to suffer the consequences. |
| Management of negative messages | F | If HFPA wanted to eliminate negative messaging, it would have given awards to more people of color. Instead, the group offered only platitudes. | If you can't do something about a problem immediately, at least lay out a plan of action. Whatever you do, do not offer empty promises or whatever the situational version of 'thoughts and prayers' is. |
| Impact on stakeholders | F | Clearly the publicity about the Globes' lack of diverse nominees (never mind the weirdness of some of its winners) no doubt turned off a number of viewers. Then the outrage over the award winners, combined with plummeting ratings and the former president's racist remarks kept HFPA's scandals in the limelight for months, ensuring that future Globes telecasts are unlikely to restore ratings. | The longer a crisis continues, the more chance it has to touch each and every stakeholder. The goal of any good crisis plan is to turn negative coverage into neutral or balanced stories as soon as possible. Which response strategy you chose is the strongest indicator of how long your mess will remain in the headlines. Denying responsibility, blaming victims, hiding and offering 'No comment' pretty much guarantee you'll be ordering midnight takeout to your crisis war room for a very long time. |
| Impact on members | C | The HFPA clearly exists to benefit its members in every way possible. The fact that it essentially was arranging payments to members to keep them happy probably worked. As long as those members are OK reaping rewards from ethically questionable actions, they probably won't leave. | Keeping existing members, customers or employees happy can certainly be a key objective in a crisis. On the other hand, if your organization is to survive, you need to attract members, employees and customers. The longer your crisis continues, the more difficult that will be to accomplish. |
| Overall Score | D- | Any crisis that isn't dealt with quickly is guaranteed to permanently tarnish the reputation of an organization. Add in the fact that the organization is in Hollywood and it won't be going away any time soon. | Situational Crisis Communication Theory suggests that your crisis response must be tailored and proportional to the type and nature of the situation. When you are dealing with a highly visible audience, in a highly visible industry you need a highly effective response. The HFPA clearly didn't have it. |

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PR Headed in Right Direction on Diversity, Empathy and Ethics, Though Long Road is Ahead

[Editor's Note: In late February and early March, PRNEWS and the **University of Georgia** collaborated on a survey of 400+ PR pros, asking them about crisis, diversity and leadership. Below are preliminary findings. PRNEWS subscribers will receive a white paper with complete findings and analysis later this year.]

At a time when diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) should be the norm in organizations, it is not. A new survey from the University of Georgia (UGA) and PRNEWS shows a consistent shortfall on diversity-related efforts.

For example, almost 30 percent of 400+ U.S. PR pros disagree with the statement that their organization has a team focused on improving DEI (see **chart 1**).

[Note: Charts show participant totals, not percentages.]

Although, 60 percent say DEI is emphasized in their organization, the nearly 30 percent who indicate it is not seems too large to ignore.

This group of roughly 30 percent of respondents is seen in several of the survey's DEI-related questions.

QUESTION:

My organization has a designated team that focuses on DEI efforts (e.g. DEI committee).

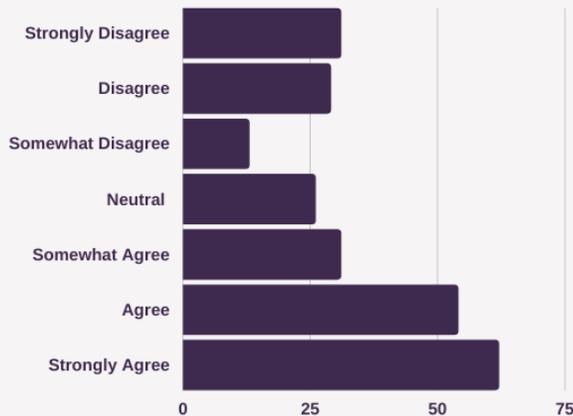


Chart 1

Source: U of GA-PRNEWS survey, 400+ PR pros (May 2021)

Also too large to ignore, though predictable, is the response to a question about diverse leadership. Here a whopping 42 percent disagree with the statement: “My organiza-

tion has diverse leadership” (see **chart 6**).

It's well known that PR is not ethnically diverse in its ranks or leadership. Not surprisingly, our survey was not ethnically diverse either: more than 80 percent of respondents identify as white/Caucasian.

QUESTION:

My organization has diverse leadership.

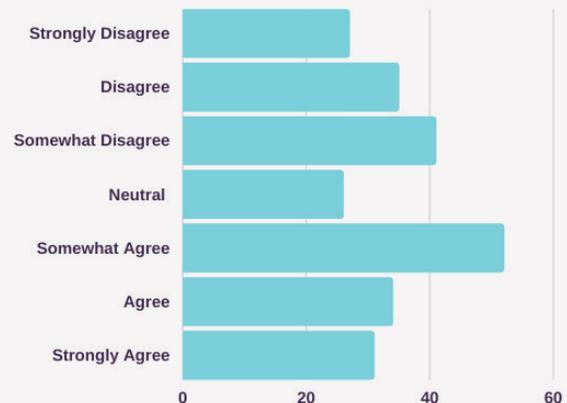


Chart 6

As we know, an ethnically homogenous industry faces many issues, not the least of which is creating messages for an increasingly diverse public. The survey points to another blind spot for PR with its relatively homogenous profile: spotting potential diversity issues (see **chart 2**).

The survey was fielded in February and March 2021, well after the start of what many are calling ‘the country’s racial awakening’ or ‘the second pandemic.’

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The survey also examines PR leaders’ emotional intelligence. A series of questions measures empathy, resourcefulness and sensemaking in PR leaders. For the purposes of the survey, definitions were as follows:

Empathy is a leader’s emotional intelligence;

Resourcefulness is how a leader determines and understands what is at his/her disposal;

Sensemaking is how a leader transitions from understanding a situation to acting on it.

The survey shows PR pros generally view their leaders

QUESTION:

My organization has identified external DEI risks that might affect the organization.

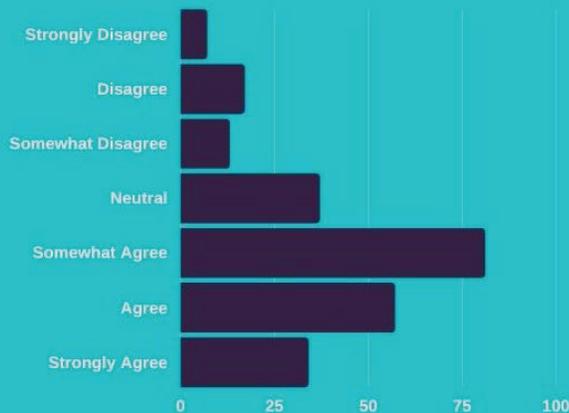


Chart 2

QUESTION:

In my immediate working environment, reports of unethical conduct are handled with caution.

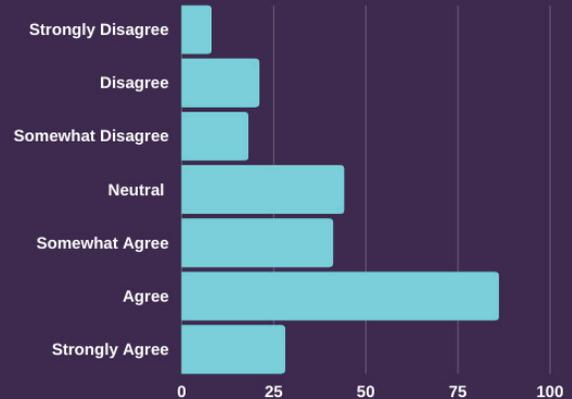


Chart 5

as emotionally intelligent. In addition, nearly all respondents (96+ percent) say PR leaders have slightly higher resourceful and sensemaking skills, compared to empathy levels. Considering the return to work will put a premium on empathetic leadership (see article on p. 9), this finding is a concern.

In addition, respondents feel as though leaders fail to provide meaning or reason behind their decisions.

Ethical issues are seldom black and white, so it is im-

portant for workplaces to create a safe space for discussions about uncomfortable issues. The survey shows ethical concerns are not always handled cautiously—suggesting the level of care that practitioners expect and need is lacking.

What is promising, however, is that 63 percent of practitioners believe ethical issues are handled seriously (see **chart 5**). There is still a way to go, but the industry is heading in the right direction. ■

CSR

FleishmanHillard Chief: Companies Can't Remain Neutral; Must Choose Issues They'll Address

[Editor's Note: We always relish the opportunity to speak with John Saunders, president and CEO of **FleishmanHillard**. The occasion this time was [Collision 2021](#), where we asked Saunders about his priorities and what's on the minds of CEOs he speaks with daily.

While he concedes the pandemic's devastation, Saunders believes organizations are stronger now than before COVID-19. He attributes this to: the ascension of corporate values; the visible action taken on critical issues; and an unprecedented perception of the importance of communication. This dialogue was edited for space and clarity.]

PRNEWS: It seems common knowledge that consumers, at

least Gen X-ers and Millennials, insist companies take stands on political and social issues. What if a company wants to avoid issues? What's your advice?



John Saunders
President & CEO
FleishmanHillard

John Saunders: Political polarization is affecting all of us. Companies have to balance not only what consumers might want, but also what their employees and other key stakeholders might prioritize.

Companies can't directly avoid political and social issues. They are like the air we breathe and the water we drink, but

Continued on page 8

they can choose what to take an overt stand on.

When considering their position, companies need to weigh the risks, opportunities and trade-offs, and consider them from multiple dimensions. This is particularly critical for global companies that need to navigate complex geopolitics and increasingly different value systems.

What is clear is that the ability to remain neutral is becoming more challenging for global companies. So, even if they decide to remain silent on a particular issue, they need to consider where the line in the sand is for them—and the implications of this bottom line on all their stakeholders, including employees—before they are forced into a position or corner by governments, activists or angry netizens.

PRNEWS: We imagine you speak with C-Suite executives regularly. What two issues are on their minds? Disinformation is a major concern for PR. Is that shared elsewhere?

Saunders: Disinformation and fake content may be a concern, and data security is certainly a high-level problem for everyone. But while CEOs can make that...a priority for their organization, most CEOs are, themselves, less able to resolve those problems directly.

PRNEWS: What issues are CEOs discussing that they can influence?

Saunders: It's a wide range of issues...they can take personal action on, or that they feel personal pressure to address. Some depend on their location or industry.

For example, will new taxation or regulation, or global conflicts, reshape their businesses? Some are worried about supply chain issues that will take months to resolve; for example, the chip shortage is keeping CEOs in a lot of tech and manufacturing businesses up at night, and demand for components and supplies has made completing contracts on time difficult.

And, of course, the speed and impact of the end of the pandemic and economic recovery are on every leader's mind.

The other universal issue is the evolution of business in society. Finding the right role for a business on social, political and cultural issues affects all of a company's relationships. [Doing this correctly] takes a lot of time and a clear view of a company's issues and choices not just for words, but for actions.

Social justice, economic fairness, climate justice and cultural polarization are new territory for most CEOs. It's often the intersections that create immediate concern.

PRNEWS: How can communicators allay CEOs' anxiety?

Saunders: Communicators can help CEOs navigate these issues. For example, they can make sure the data and analyt-

ics used for decision-making represent current and potential perceptions among key audiences as accurately as possible, so decisions are grounded in good information.

In addition, they can help articulate the values that the company uses to guide its business and its interactions with others, continually focusing on the value the company creates through its products, services and jobs; and the valuation of the enterprise or organization as a whole—in context—so its responses to issues are understood as part of the organization's purpose.

PRNEWS: What are your top priorities at FleishmanHillard?

Saunders: Our first focus is on our people and putting talent at the center. This past year had many challenges for our colleagues on a personal level and we want to ensure they are supported. As a part of our focus we're continuing to roll out robust learning and development opportunities that equip our people to better support our clients while also advancing their careers.

We also continue our pursuit to be the most inclusive communications agency in the world and have set bold, action-oriented goals with a plan that embeds DE&I into the nervous system of our agency.

Our other priority, of course, is our clients and continuing to bring them innovative, new solutions. Despite the pandemic, 2020 was one of our best years, thanks to our people's tremendous commitment to supporting our clients as they navigated the unknown. We've invested in the areas of intelligence, creativity, DE&I and digitally-led media and social media experiences. We will continue to evolve our offerings to ensure we're helping clients stay ahead of the trends and their competitors.

PRNEWS: The last time we spoke, you told me about your dinner with Sir Simon Rattle and how he said the Berlin Philharmonic was the world's greatest orchestra, but only when they play together. With so many employees working from home now, is creating and maintaining a corporate culture more difficult or have companies adjusted?

Saunders: Yes, you've gotten great mileage out of that story since. I'm just hoping that Sir Simon doesn't come looking for royalties from either of us!

Creating and maintaining the best, most supportive and effective company culture is never easy. Like a lot of things, it seems effortless when it works, but underneath great cultures have clarity on values and standards of interaction, and strong leaders who take responsibility for results as they share credit with the teams that generate them.

Especially under the pressure of the series of public

Continued on page 15



FLEISHMANHILLARD
AT A GLANCE

Founded: 1946
Parent: Omnicom Public Relations Group
HQ: St. Louis, MO
Offices: 80 in 30+ countries, affiliates in 50 countries
Employees: 4,200+ (est.)
Annual Revenue: \$607 million (est.)
Source: media reports

Consider Mental Health as PR Pros Return to Office

[Editor's Note: As May is [Mental Health Month](#), we asked **Infinite Global's** global COO Isabel Podda and VP Sophie Cikovsky to discuss the importance of mental health awareness in PR as communicators return to the office. Since PR traditionally is in the top 10 of [most-stressful](#) occupations, [mental health awareness](#) is critical. It's more so in [the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic](#).]

Over the last few years the PR industry has come to acknowledge and address the mental health challenges of being a communication professional. The job is undoubtedly stressful: tight deadlines, high client expectations and an unpredictable news cycle drive many to experience anxiety, depression and other serious mental health conditions.

Many companies have implemented changes to promote positive mental health among their teams. Employee Assistant Programs, Mental Health First Aid training, mindfulness activities and a more open dialogue around mental health can and have had a real impact on those who have suffered—too often in silence.

However, the global COVID-19 pandemic forced a whole new way of life on many industries, including PR. This turned PR's usual mental health challenges into a crisis.

PANDEMIC HURTS PR PROS' MENTAL HEALTH

For example, in October 2020, the **Chartered Institute of Public Relations** in the UK reported that [82 percent of respondents](#) to its Annual Mental Health survey felt the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health.

Uncertainty and fear were at an all-time high and working in an unremittingly bleak news cycle escalated or introduced triggers for serious mental health conditions.

As the months dragged on, many of us were spending 24 hours a day in small, confined spaces that were at once our office, gym and bedroom. This social isolation took its toll, as did the fatigue of endless video calls.

Stress, irritability, poor sleep, depression and burnout became commonplace, even among those who had never experienced poor mental health before.

How did PR leaders respond? In part, they used some of the basics of PR. They listened, adapted and communicated.

Actively engaging with teams about their mental health throughout the pandemic helped leaders recognize and implement changes they wouldn't have thought to emphasize during more precedented times.

Encouraging team members to take breaks from the news and extended breaks from email were key, as was an open di-



alogue about available resources for those struggling with mental health.

Above all this moment raised the importance of communicating clearly expectations leaders have of their teams and the various working practices available to promote positive mental health.

As the impact of the global vaccination program facilitates a return to the office, PR will face new challenges. Leaders need to retain some of the benefits staff enjoyed by not being in offices Monday to Friday while, at the same time, providing the collaborative social environment teams miss.

So how do PR leaders and PR pros navigate the coming months?

LISTEN WELL AND ACT

First, be aware, listen and communicate—one size doesn't fit all. Some people will relish returning to the office, others will be reluctant and, in some cases, fearful.

It would be unnatural not to feel some apprehension when taking public transport again or being in more crowded environments. Ask your teams what they want and need. Keep listening, communicating and giving people time to adapt. Review office plans to ensure they work for purpose for your teams and create an environment that fosters collaboration.

FLEXIBILITY

Second, be flexible; [presenteeism](#) is not a route to success. Consider keeping an element of WFH as an option.

Third, recognize that the lessons of 2020 created an incredible opportunity. Without doubt, the pandemic and Black Lives Matter bolstered a positive, necessary drive for change and accountability in the corporate world.

Society continues to take a massive shift and with that businesses need to change. Employees, rightfully, are demanding more about their employers' impact on the world.

PR firms can have a positive impact on the mental health of companies they represent. Promote Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) elements into how the company operates. In addition, keeping DEI and wider ESG policies and actions moving forward will, in turn, support positive mental health.

Above all, keep the conversation and policies about mental health alive. ■

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“ Encouraging team members to take breaks from the news and email were key, as was an open dialogue about resources for those struggling with mental health. ”

A Fast Fall from Grace: Lessons from Trader Joe's Labor Woes and the Power of Twitter

[Editor's Note: This mini-case study shows how quickly organizations, even those with very good reputations, can find themselves in a PR mess, particularly when leadership seems out of touch with stakeholders and the forces of social media and public opinion become involved.]

The PR tide turned quickly for **Trader Joe's**.

Its founder, Joe Columbe, died Feb. 28, 2020, aged 89. Obituaries in the **New York Times** and the **Washington Post** painted a rosy picture of a management mogul committed to fair compensation and a standout customer experience. The obits touted the grocery chain's cult status.

An **Associated Press** story described Trader Joe's' employees as "among retail's best compensated, with medical, dental, vision and retirement plans and annual salary increases the company says range from seven percent to 10 percent." And retention's high: Many workers stay for decades.

The pandemic tested the company's worker-friendly reputation, though. In addition, perhaps the pandemic also tested the longevity of company values after the passing of its owner. At this point, it's difficult to say.

Early in the pandemic, as supplies flew off shelves and grocery store staff were beginning to enjoy their newfound reputation as 'essential workers,' they were worrying about safety. On March 1, 2020, a **Twitter** account, @TraderJoesUnion, launched.

It remains unclear exactly who was responsible for the account and its content.

A few weeks later the Twitter account **urged** shoppers to email Trader Joe's president of stores Jon Basalone to demand that it institute hazard pay, at time and a half.

In addition, it urged customers to call for employees to receive paid sick leave and paid quarantine. Shoppers should "avoid Trader Joe's" until these demands are met, it said.

FROM TWITTER TO BAD PRESS

In mid-April 2020, the Twitter account's content and uprising spurred media coverage and mounting questions.

A **Daily Beast** article was headlined: "Blood on Their Hands': Trader Joe's Workers Are Angry and Terrified." It described "a climate of fear and confusion" after a worker died of COVID-19.

In response, Trader Joe's scrambled to establish health guidelines while maintaining its friendly employee and customer image.

Still, the media coverage continued. **Vox Media's Eater** ran an article, titled "What the Hell Is Going on at Trader Joe's?" It chronicled workers' health and safety issues, as well as hinting at counter-unionization measures, such as restricting employee group chats.

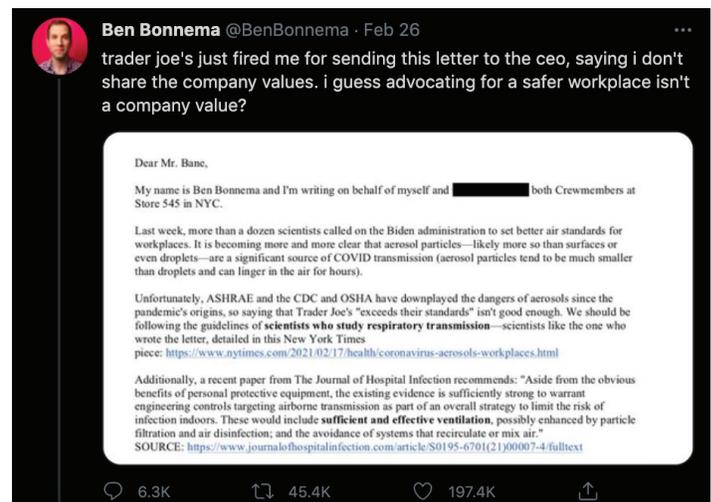
Earlier this year, with the pandemic's toll on frontline workers undeniable, Trader Joe's unveiled an employee-focused

initiative.

In January 2021, the company said it would give workers **two hours pay** for each vaccine shot they received.

Sometimes Trader Joe's needed nudging. For example, in February, the company **acquiesced** to a Seattle City Council mandate for grocery stores to raise pay by \$4 per hour for front-line employees; however, Trader Joe's said it will forgo its usual mid-year raises.

When faced with a similar law in California to raise pay \$4 per hour, **Kroger** chose to **close several stores**.



A TERMINATION SCANDAL ERUPTS

In late February 2021, employee Ben Bonnema shared **a letter** on social (see above) that he said got him fired. The letter listed suggestions for the safety of employees and shoppers during the pandemic. His suggestions included upgrading stores' air filters to meet **CDC** guidelines and stricter action against mask-wearing noncompliance.

Support for Bonnema flooded social media, and health experts even **wrote to the Biden administration** in his defense, stating the former employee's recommendations were valid.

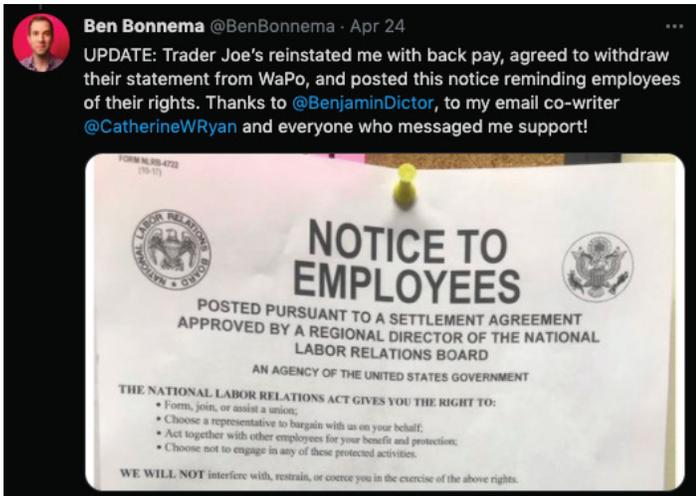
Initially, Trader Joe's dismissed Bonnema's allegations. A spokesman told The Washington Post that "misinformation" was circulating about the circumstances of his termination.

The spokesperson **claimed** Bonnema showed "disrespect...toward our customers." That's why he was fired, the company spokesperson said, adding, "Nothing is more important at Trader Joe's than the safety of our Crew Members and customers."

Countering those claims on social, Bonnema shared **his latest review**, where a supervisor awarded him perfect marks, including in 'Customer Experience.'

RESCINDING AND REPAIR

As we write in late April, things are better for Bonnema. He



tweeted Apr. 26 that Trader Joe's reinstated him—with back pay. Moreover, the brand rescinded its “misinformation” and “disrespect” media comments about him.

In addition, Trader Joe's posted a **National Labor Relations Board** (NLRB) notice in the break room at Bonnema's store in NYC reminding employees of [their right to unionize](#).

LESSONS: STOP PLAYING DEFENSE

Trader Joe's PR team could have done several things better. Its first mistake was bad-mouthing Bonnema at time when the plight of frontline workers was a major issue.

“Don't try to speak for the other side or ascribe motives to your adversary's actions. It's not perceived as credible, and it's too negative” and sounds defensive, Gene Grabowski, principal at **kglobal**, says.

“Don't tell employees what you stand against; tell them what you stand for.” This is especially true when speaking with younger workers, Grabowski says—an accurate descriptor of college-educated [young staff who traditionally make up a large portion of store employees](#).

WHO'S THE AUDIENCE?

In addition, using anti-union language can seem rooted in outdated thinking and ideas.

“Companies need to be using language that speaks to those who influence employees—their friends, families and relatives—as much as to the employees themselves.”

For instance, looking at the comments section on Bonnema's posts shows a number of supporters who the company might have done well to listen to before issuing comments.

Much like the influencer phenomenon, “Today's workers care about what those around them think of their status [and] job conditions,” says Grabowski. He adds that workers have access to more information than their predecessors. In other words, even without the break-room notice, Bonnema knew his rights and did his homework before going public.

SPEND TIME IN EMPLOYEES' SHOES

In employee-facing messages, “companies are looking through the wrong end of the telescope,” Grabowski argues.

Rather than testing messages with employees or their networks, many employers play a guessing game. They launch messages they *think* will resonate, he says.

“I'd venture to say that almost no one in a white-collar position at most major companies today has worked even a week on the shop floor [at their brand],” he says.

“Some may have visited for a day or two, but almost none have actually worked there. If they did, their points of view and employee messaging would take on a different tenor,” he concludes.

UNIONS SHOULD GET EMPLOYEES TALKING

For veteran union communicator Roger Kerson, creative director at **RK Communications**, the most powerful communication goal is “getting workers talking to each other.”

It's crucial “to provide information and resources, so workers can have those important workplace conversations that [launch] action to improve working conditions,” he says. Today, those conversations might involve PPE or safety provisions, mirroring Bonnema's concerns.

Much like the word-of-mouth approach Grabowski details, Kerson says that “what Jane on the loading dock says is more important” than messages from public figures like President Biden, [who spoke in support of Amazon](#) workers before the recent [failed union vote](#) in Alabama.

In an economy where only six percent of private sector workers have union representation, “employees have a lot more rights than they know about,” Kerson says.

It's important for unions to communicate that workers have the right to talk to their peers about workplace issues onsite—though their employer is unlikely to post break-room notices about that right, he says.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS MEETING PLACE

Kerson sees the growth of social media as a great opportunity for peer-to-peer labor conversations.

“From **Facebook** groups to private chats on **Instagram**, [workers'] creativity knows no bounds,” he says.

When asked about workers' rights to post their employers' labor practices on social media, Kerson jests that some NLRB laws were written “before Bill Gates was born.” Still, in general, federal law protects posting public statements about workplace practices.

NLRB protections likely explain why **Google** parent **Alphabet** [chose to settle](#) a recent lawsuit with a contractor—who was fired for a pro-union statement on social media—rather than taking the case to court.

Ultimately, companies and labor would do well to continue heeding the crucial peer-to-peer missives happening online before terminating employees or speaking to the press.

And the @TraderJoesUnion Twitter handle that was started at the beginning of the pandemic? It's a canary in the coal mine. The company will face more PR woes if it continues down the path of defensiveness and dismissal of employees' concerns. ■

enon: Open season on the lives of Black people.”

- ▶ Most of the PR pros do not believe there will be a major consumer outbreak, or ‘day of reckoning,’ on May 25 against companies that spoke out last summer and are judged to have done too little since.

On the other hand, companies will not get off without scrutiny. Several PR pros anticipate a rise in accountability this year.

“The stakes are high, and in the next few weeks, organizations and corporate leaders must prepare for inevitable questions and gain clarity about where they are on their diversity, equity and inclusion journeys,” Saunders says.

WIDER ACCOUNTABILITY

In addition, the push for accountability will not come from consumers alone. Stakeholders “in the larger sense” of the term—staff, investors, customers and the media—will seek accountability “and action” from companies, says Jenny Wang, a VP at **Clyde Group** in Washington, DC.

As such, Wang counsels companies to speak with stakeholders on a regular basis, updating them on DEI progress and communicating openly where more work is needed.



Jenny Wang
VP
Clyde Group

Natasha Lamb, managing partner and co-founder at **Arjuna Capital**, an investment firm that tracks corporate activity on racial equity and sustainability, is eyeing the spring proxy season anxiously.



Natasha Lamb
Managing Partner
Arjuna Capital

“[Spring] will be a litmus test to see how companies respond to their investor demands for real action on racial equity,” she says. “The question is whether or not the rubber will meet the road, because corporate statements of solidarity are one thing; meaningful change is another,” Lamb adds.

Some responsible investors and other stakeholders believe companies should conduct racial equity and gender pay audits through third parties en route to creating meaningful change. So far, corporate reaction to these demands is **mixed**. Ostensibly a supporter of diversity, **Google** is the **most recent recipient** of such demands.

Behemoth **BlackRock** said April 1 it will **undergo a racial equity audit**. The move could prompt other companies.

- ▶ The final takeaway is that there’s no one-size-fits-all way for companies to deal with May 25.

Whatever a company does that day—crafts a message or remains silent—nearly all agree its actions should reflect the organization’s values, brand pillars, culture and whom they serve. In addition, the message, if there is one, should be consistent with the company’s previous tone.

A Day of Reckoning?

66%: Percentage of companies in the S&P 500 that issued statements supporting racial reckoning in the wake of George Floyd’s killing in 2020

36%: Percentage of S&P 500 companies that made financial contributions to racial justice groups

14%: Percentage of S&P 500 companies that said “Black Lives Matter”

\$90 million: Black Lives Matter’s fundraising total in 2020

\$100 million: The value of Apple’s Racial and Justice Equity Initiative, announced Aug. 13, 2020

\$55.3 billion: Apple’s 2019 profit (\$100 million is 0.18% of Apple’s profit)

3.6%: The fall in Black workers’ hourly median earnings, adjusted for inflation, since 2000; Black workers’ hourly wages are 75.6 percent of what white workers receive; median income for full-time working women in the U.S. is 80 percent that of men.

\$12 Trillion: The amount closing U.S. minority and gender wage gaps 20 years ago could have generated in additional national income, according to Citigroup estimates.

Sources: *As You Sow*, “S&P 500 Racial Justice and DEI Scorecard,” March 2021; *Associated Press*; *Arjuna Capital*; *The Verge*

Communicator Melisa Vela-Williamson, founder, **MWV Communications**, counsels companies against using May 25 “as a stage...to externally declare where you are in your [DEI] journey.”

Instead, companies should mark the day with a solemn, kind-hearted message of remembrance. May 25, she says, is a solemn anniversary commemorating a death “that forced us to look at systemic racist practices that we have been too complicit in.” Treat the day respectfully is her advice.



Melissa Vela-Williamson
Founder
MWV
Communications

MAY 25 AND EMPLOYEE NEEDS

Veteran brand communicator Charlene Wheelless, now senior advisor for equity and justice at **APCO Worldwide**, notes the mental health needs of May 25.

“A day of remembrance can help employees who continue to struggle with the trauma” that George Floyd’s murder and Derek Chauvin’s trial and verdict brought, she says.

In addition, Wheeless is concerned that additional police encounters have left people “struggling to make sense of what is happening in a society many thought had come farther than this.”

She urges communicators to ensure leaders recognize that the anniversary “may lead to new difficulty for employees and their well-being.” Companies, she says, should “allow people to have space to process.”

Both Wang and Wheeless suggest companies decide whether small or large meetings work best for them.

It might be more important for a company leader to address a small contingent or an ERG (Employee Resource Group), Wang says.

Topics can include DEI progress the company has made, how employees are feeling and what employees and the company can do together to achieve progress, Wheeless says.



Charlene Wheeless
Senior Advisor for
Equity and Justice
APCO Worldwide

FOCUSING FORWARD AND CREATING TRUST

For communicators crafting talking points for leaders who plan to mark the date, Wheeless recommends “focusing forward...reiterating the recognition that social and racial injustice exist, confirming your and the company’s commitment to making change and backing up words with an explanation of how the company is “taking sustainable action.”

The anniversary is an opportunity, she adds, for leaders “to create a new kind of trust—one built on deeds, not dialogue.”

Similarly, Shelton is advising companies to make May 25 “a day of reflection and action.” She also urges companies that were active early “to re-pledge and re-commit themselves.” This could include partnering with additional advocacy groups and/or providing new funding to them.

A SOCIAL MEDIA PAUSE

Vela-Williamson says communicators should plan now concerning deploying social and other messaging May 25.

“Social posts that day should not be too light-hearted, cheeky or appear tone deaf in any way,” she advises. Moreover, if the message you’re sending isn’t vital, “particularly if public sentiment leading up to that day seems charged or pained, it’s best to pause regular content that day,” she adds.

Whatever a company decides about May 25 messaging, she advises “definitely have a diverse group of staff, one being a PR pro, review the copy and accompanying visuals.”

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

For companies that haven’t done much or anything DEI-related since May 25, the communicators urge caution, though not silence in every case.

Acknowledge that you’re late “and then get to work making change happen,” Wheeless says.

Similarly, Wang says if a company has made little prog-

ress since May 25, 2020, “it’s tone-deaf to start putting out statements now. That just raises valid questions from stakeholders...if you haven’t done anything since last May 25, that speaks volumes.”

And if a company issued statements without taking action, releasing another statement this May 25th “is just more words...and it’s corporate performative allyship,” Wang argues.

Alternately, Wheeless cautions against focusing on what a company hasn’t done DEI-wise, “especially when the opportunity to do something is in front of you. Start the journey!”

Companies that have done little or nothing on DEI since last May can take basic steps to start their journey, the PR pros said. One relatively easy move is getting inclusivity training for employees. Another is committing to do volunteer work with a social-justice organization. Forming ESGs to promote inclusivity is another possibility.

Vela-Williamson makes an interesting point about the importance of including diversity in everything a company does. DEI, she says, encompasses how a company recruits, hires and promotes, of course, but also “includes how and whom a company highlights, how it creates products and services and for whom and generally how it approaches human relationships. It’s complex but should always be explored, particularly within our organizations.”

NO RECKONING

As we noted above, our interviews found nobody expects a May 25 consumer reckoning against companies. Consumers, though, will “look under the hood” of organizations that made or make statements and lack a history of promoting social justice, Vela-Williamson says.

It’s more likely, though, that a mix of consumers, activists and other stakeholders will call for transparency, especially if a company publicly shared a declaration, pledge or promise a year ago.

“Rather than waiting for that demand, companies or organizations that made statements about change initiatives or pledges would benefit from preparing to share their progress proactively,” Vela-Williamson says.

She adds, “This must be done with great sensitivity, and I’d recommend it only if the organization had made such a pledge before, so they aren’t accused of appropriating this anniversary for their own gain.”

Saunders believes there’s a delicate line for companies to consider. “Perfection” on diversity, he says, “cannot be the enemy of real progress. But, authenticity in action demands that companies decide what side of history they are on. Their credibility hinges on saying what they mean and doing what they say.” ■

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The Six-Step Philosophy Makes PR a Fact-Based, Successful Activity



For those interested in approaching PR as a research-and-reality-informed process, there is a simple framework: ‘the Public Relations continuum.’ In the fast-paced omni-channel world of modern PR, this fact-based philosophy provides a blueprint for success. The six-step cycle drives continual improvement, versus objectives and against competitors, to provide opportunities for refinement with every rotation.

Research drives the progression. The two most-common reasons communicators invest in PR research is to: 1) demonstrate the value of PR and 2) generate a positive return on investment (ROI). A research-based progression, the PR Continuum satisfies both.

The amount of data available, some of it free, makes this process more accessible than ever.



Six to Succeed: Data and analysis power the fact-based PR Continuum's steps to success. Source: The author

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The process begins with [The Landscape Analysis](#), which applies research to assess your operating environment, internally and externally. This formative step enables ‘clean-slate PR,’ which makes no assumptions about objectives, strategies, tactics or outcomes. The approach fosters a fresh start for assessing the priorities of the organization and the audiences with whom you communicate.

Landscape Analysis also takes an objective view of past performance, competitors and society to determine the degree to which PR can advance the organization's priorities.

SETTING OBJECTIVES

To advance the enterprise, communicators must understand the organization's aims to help achieve its business objectives. While each component of the research-based PR Continuum is integral to achieving positive results, the initial stage of objectives-setting is critical (it's also frequently overlooked).

Setting objectives is the foundation for the entire PR program on which strategy, execution and evaluation are formed. What's more, setting and then beating objectives that are meaningful,

reasonable and measurable supports the communicator's ability to demonstrate the value of PR and drive ROI.

STRATEGY

The cycle continues with strategy development, which involves interpretation of research to identify a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Once specified, strategy development focuses on the messages that these audiences find credible and compelling when coming from your organization.

The result is stakeholder-centric communication that lays the groundwork for purposeful strategy and tactics.

Strategies—unlike tactics—remain over time and must support a variety of tactical bursts of activity to drive results. As such, research helps inform the messaging and targeting approaches most likely to survive short-term market shifts to deliver positive, sustainable results.

CAMPAIGN EXECUTION

Strategy ignites campaign execution. In shorter bursts of action, these tactics deliver strategic messages to the stakeholders most likely to respond affirmatively. Research informs campaigns by identifying the channels—traditional and social media sources, spokespeople, influencers, events, partners, causes and more—through which messages can be delivered to the target stakeholders in ways that are motivating, engaging and trustworthy.

Tactical research is time-based and should be updated regularly to identify which communications vehicles offer the greatest likelihood for success at a given moment. Just as important, tactics must reflect strategy and contribute to meeting or beating objectives.

EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

After data collection, statistical analysis helps evaluate performance for continuous improvement. Analysis determines what the results mean and how well they reflect success to guide refinement moving forward.

The purpose of evaluation is to optimize rather than to celebrate (sometimes, you can do both!). Rather than a post-mortem scorecard, we must seek real-time and ‘right-time’ insights to inform and improve as we prepare for the future. It is not the quantity of the data but the quality of the insights and the degree to which the program delivered on its objectives that make research-based evaluation meaningful.

CONSULTATION

As the cycle completes a rotation, we gain opportunities to offer consultation to executives in ways that go beyond PR. Media analysis, one of the most common forms of communication research, offers the unique ability to simultaneously

reflect and shape public opinion. PR research, when it includes competitive analysis, provides insight and guidance throughout the enterprise as the organization advances along a fact-based continuum of its own.

DEMONSTRATING VALUE AND GENERATING ROI

To an earlier point, the desire to demonstrate value and generate ROI motivate most PR pros who invest in communication research. The fact-based continuum helps in both cases:

Very often, demonstrating value begins with the Landscape Analysis. You assess the needs of the organization and prioritize executives' business goals. Use this input and align with key executives to set objectives that are reasonable, measurable and meaningful. Once they're approved, you possess the ingredients to overcome executive subjectivity by meeting or beating the objectives you set with them. Continually measuring and refining progress helps communicators improve performance daily. By the time your annual review arrives, you will have had hundreds of opportunities to

Continued from page 8

emergencies we've faced in the past year, leaders have had the opportunity to demonstrate how they live up to the organization's values with actions, flexibility and accountability. Even those who never got very comfortable with empathetic engagement found more ways to show up in a personal and supportive way for their people.

Some people think a lot of damage has been done to business cultures due to the pressures and economic impact of the pandemic. And it is undoubtedly true that many employees have been hit hard personally.

But, I think more organizations have gotten stronger than weaker, because whether it is COVID-19, the confrontation with social justice issues or other challenges in different markets, values have been on display, actions have been visible and the level of attention on who we are and what we do in any organization has never been higher.

PRNEWS: How is FleishmanHillard advising companies on WFH?

Saunders: Going forward, we're advising organizations to put a concerted effort into analyzing and resetting the employee experience. Virtual technology tools will still be important for communication, but new requirements should be made as the needs shift from productivity to cultural cohesion and collaboration.

One emerging issue I think all businesses need to be considering right now is the strength of their employer brand. At this moment, the job market is as lively and competitive as it has been in generations. More and more companies embracing flexibility means more and more opportunities for workers, who may now be able to work virtually for a company based in another market on the other side of the country.

refine for a positive outcome.

Communication research, analysis and evaluation enable the PR function to properly generate a positive ROI. We do this in three ways:

- Efficiency by doing more with less and for less
- Revenue generation by connecting PR to sales
- Avoiding catastrophic cost by spotting and evading traps before they occur

Some PR practitioners approach communication as an art form, but there's more to it. In fact, there's more to art as well. Most art employs an underlying structural foundation. Even improv comedy and improvised jazz solos are based on rules. Rather than inhibiting creativity, these rules focus creativity to where it will generate the best outcome. Similarly, many purely creative PR programs fail to deliver. We need to do something different. And the difference ties directly to fact-based PR. ■

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This is likely to be an attractive proposition for workers who have embraced working remotely during the past year and don't want to continue working for an employer that will require them to return to a physical workplace. To be certain, the effects of this will be far-reaching, but in organizations unable to nurture a strong, healthy culture, I'm afraid they will experience the attrition of top talent at a greater rate than those organizations that invest in their culture today and for the long term.

PRNEWS: One of the buzz words of the pandemic, and you alluded to it, is 'pivoting.' Besides 'hybrid,' what will the buzzword(s) of the return-to-work period be for communicators and the companies they advise?

Saunders: 'Agile' seems to be another buzzword—referring to the flexible policies that many companies are putting in place as they consider the new world of work. It has previously been used in a manufacturing context, but now the connotation is more philosophical as companies consider how to put processes and parameters around what is a very fluid and evolving situation.

PRNEWS: How is staff at FleishmanHillard preparing to return to the office?

Saunders: We have a group of senior leaders working on this now. We're looking at how we're going to approach a return to work, taking into consideration first and foremost employee safety, but also employee expectations of increased flexibility and the needs of our clients and the business. ■

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Influencers Rule on Mother's Day Promos, But 2021 Consumer Engagement Off 60% vs 2019

In anticipation of Mother's Day this Sunday, we asked **Shareable** to gather Mother's Day-related data on social content from 3/28/21-4/27/21 and compare it to the same month-long period in 2020 and 2019.

Much of the 2021 content centers on gifts consumers are planning to buy mothers and grandmothers, Shareable's Madison Busick says.

Provided exclusively to PRNEWS, the Shareable data for 2021 show an 18 percent increase in consumer engagement versus 2020.

Yet 2021's consumer engagement was off a whopping 60 percent from 2019's pre-pandemic figures across **Facebook, Instagram** and **Twitter**.

Consumer engagement is shown on these charts as Actions, or the sum of likes, comments and re-posts.

The influencer with the most actions was reality star Sadie Robertson, 23, of "Duck Dynasty," with 303K actions on a [sole Instagram post](#), a sponsored partnership with **Saaya Roses** that offered a discount for Mother's Day.

Actress Zooeey Deschanel, averaged 85,500 actions on her two posts (one was sponsored content for **Cricut**, offering giveaways). Kylie Jenner's [singular Twitter post](#), promoting **Kylie Skin** for Mother's Day, had nearly 8,000 actions.

Coach, the most prolific poster, with 35 pieces of content, averaged just fewer than 3,900 consumer engagements.

At least in the run-up to Mother's Day, partnering with influencers drastically increases consumer engagement. ■

TOP BRANDS, ORGANIZATIONS & INFLUENCERS POSTING ABOUT MOTHER'S DAY

Based on Total Actions (reactions, comments, and shares) 3/28/2021-4/27/2021

Sources: @

| RANK | PAGE | ACTIONS @ | CONTENT @ |
|------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Sadie Robertson | 303K | 1 |
| 2 | Zooeey Deschanel | 169K | 1 |
| 3 | Coach | 119K | 10 |
| 4 | Bernice Burgos | 100K | 2 |
| 5 | Lindsay Arnold | 83K | 1 |
| 6 | Kylie Cosmetics | 64K | 2 |
| 7 | Crate and Barrel | 60K | 3 |
| 8 | Marc Jacobs | 52K | 6 |
| 9 | Ashlyn Harris | 49K | 1 |
| 10 | Kris Jenner | 47K | 1 |

TOP BRANDS, ORGANIZATIONS & INFLUENCERS POSTING ABOUT MOTHER'S DAY

Based on Total Actions (reactions, comments, and shares) 3/28/2021-4/27/2021

Sources: f

| RANK | PAGE | ACTIONS f | CONTENT f |
|------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Tropical Cake Pops | 108K | 6 |
| 2 | Sandra Kaminski | 61K | 9 |
| 3 | Smart School House | 44K | 3 |
| 4 | My Little Bakery | 40K | 10 |
| 5 | NatashasKitchen.com | 40K | 2 |
| 6 | Paula Deen | 37K | 3 |
| 7 | Kylie Jenner | 33K | 1 |
| 8 | 5-Minute Crafts | 28K | 1 |
| 9 | Buddy Valastro | 23K | 1 |
| 10 | iHeartDogs.com | 23K | 27 |

TOP BRANDS, ORGANIZATIONS & INFLUENCERS POSTING ABOUT MOTHER'S DAY

Based on Total Actions (reactions, comments, and shares) 3/28/2021-4/27/2021

Sources: t

| RANK | PAGE | ACTIONS t | CONTENT t |
|------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Billboard | 84K | 3 |
| 2 | Kylie Jenner | 7.9K | 1 |
| 3 | Ciara | 1.4K | 1 |
| 4 | Rose Ellen Dix | 1.6K | 1 |
| 5 | Funko | 1.5K | 4 |
| 6 | Surly Basseby | 1.4K | 1 |
| 7 | Coach | 1.4K | 9 |
| 8 | Shudder | 1.1K | 3 |
| 9 | People | 1.1K | 7 |
| 10 | Richard Marx | 911 | 1 |

Source: **Shareable**