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PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Public relations is increasingly in the spotlight for major marketers and their key brand initiatives. One key driver of this trend, clearly, is the rise of social media, as companies focus on new ways to engage with their customers to tell dynamic stories across multiple platforms. In addition, companies are focused on reputation and how issues relate to marketing challenges in today's increasingly complex world.

We created this special section to cue marketers in to how public relations is taking a more prominent place in integrated marketing campaigns and to take a look at what this means for the overall marketing services industry. It also highlights the variety of ways in which CMOs and brand managers can partner with PR firms to drive results.

Our lead story takes a panoramic look at general trends in public relations, with special emphasis on firms' increasing orientation toward idea generation and creativity, as well as the 10 things you need to know about digital media in 2012. Other stories look at the diverse and nontraditional new talent public relations firms are hiring (page C10) and the ways firms are helping to solve clients' corporate social responsibility issues (page C14).

As you will see in this section, brands are finding dynamic, integrated and creative partners in today's public relations firms. For more information about America's leading PR firms, we encourage you to visit the Council of Public Relations Firms website at prfirms.org.

Andy Polansky

2011-2012 Chairman, Council of Public Relations Firms,* and President, Weber Shandwick

*The council is the U.S. trade association for public relations firms.



COUNCIL of PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

The Council's resources include the searchable database Find-a-Firm and RFPBuilder, both designed to assist client organizations.

The Council of PR Firms would like to thank its members who supported this section.

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THE BIG IDEA

BY JULIE LIESSE

The Big Idea. It's always been the ultimate goal of marketing communications: the idea that perfectly encompasses a brand's personality while connecting with consumers in a way that ultimately generates transactions. Brands remain on the never-ending quest for the Big Idea. As the media landscape and technology transform the way consumers receive information, increasingly it's public relations firms that are clients' partners on that quest.

"Today what we see is a lot more jump ball," says Harris Diamond, CEO of Weber Shandwick. "Clients are inviting digital firms, advertising agencies, PR firms to the table. And PR firms are in the best of all worlds, increasingly recognized for the strength of our creativity and our strategic insights to transform a brand."

Says Dave Senay, CEO of Fleishman-Hillard, "There is wide agreement that it is a great time for public relations. Part of that is the democratization of ideation. Today it is less important where the ideas are coming from; what matters is the quality of the idea."

The criteria for a Big Idea have changed, says Gary Stockman, CEO of Porter Novelli. "What makes an idea big used to be how creative it was. Now, increasingly, the criterion is how joined up it is," Mr. Stockman says. "What makes a Big Idea... is the ability to leverage the influence ecosystem to engage audiences and create measurable change."

Today's Big Ideas employ a mix of paid media, earned media (traditional press coverage), owned media (company-owned websites, blogs, etc.) and shared media (social media, including blogs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). Big Ideas move fast. They engage consumers with relevant content, such as Unilever's Degree for Men's Adrenalist website. Like HP's ePrint Live and Philips' "Wake Up the

Town" efforts, they find out-of-the-box ways to use new tools for those old marketing standbys, product sampling, experiential marketing and test marketing. They give consumers the opportunity to own the brand, as Wrangler did with its Next Blue initiative.

Those criteria play into the historic strengths of public relations firms.

"The most valuable media in the world is the media you can't buy—and that has always been where PR firms have played. We never had the luxury of paying for our message," says Rob Flaherty, president of Ketchum. "PR remains immersed in the most valuable real estate today—but today, the gatekeeper is the consumer rather than the reporter or editor."

"The most influential source is a recommendation from a friend. If you can find something that consumers are genuinely excited about and amplify that after it's caught fire, that is magic."

This summer, Carmichael Lynch Spong helped client Hormel Foods Corp.'s Jennie-O turkey brand create some magic and a Big Idea. Hormel wanted to find a way to get consumers to appreciate how easy—and tasty—it was to substitute Jennie-O ground turkey in recipes that called for ground beef. For five days, Jennie-O took over the Bistro Truck, a popular Manhattan food truck, wrap-

ping it with "Make the Switch" banners. Instead of using ground beef, the truck's burgers were made from ground turkey—and each day, courtesy of Jennie-O, the truck gave away 500 free gourmet turkey burgers at lunch. The truck's location and menu were previewed to local foodies and bloggers, and posted daily on Facebook, Twitter and a special microsite.

The social media universe took over. About 450,000 tweets and retweets mentioned the "Make the Switch" promotion and locations. People lined up for thousands of free Jennie-O burgers. Within five days the Facebook page had 23,000 "likes," and ground turkey sales rose 7 percent in New York.

The "Make the Switch" takeover was so successful it has been applied to other cities and has become the subject of Jennie-O TV commercials. "The genesis of all this was the sampling idea, now being executed on a national level," says CL Spong President Doug Spong.

Richard Edelman, president-CEO of Edelman, says it makes sense that PR firms are more often in the lead in today's marketing campaigns. "We are going first more often than not," he says.

He points to his firm's work for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox gaming system. "We were engaging with bloggers and fans eight to 10 months before the ads broke.

"Our job is no longer doing a press conference to break the ads—we are building engagement with enthusiasts to create a runway of credibility for a new brand or campaign."

Under the old model of public relations, the job of a PR firm was to get a story in the newspaper. Says Mr. Stockman, "If we got a piece in The Wall Street Journal, we'd give ourselves high fives. Now, if you get a piece in the Journal, you have produced a valuable piece of content and you begin asking, 'What more am I going to do with this?' We need to be thinking more broadly than we used to. We are thinking about content as an asset that needs to be managed."

GolinHarris reorganized this year to reflect what it believed clients came to it for. "Our marketing world is changing, media is changing and none of the agencies working in it were changing, which seemed odd," says CEO Fred Cook. "We used to just compete with PR firms. Now we compete with everyone in marketing: ad agencies, digital agencies, media buying firms. The landscape for us is different than it used to be. To be as successful 10 years from now, we needed to think about how we approached our work and change at a very fundamental level."

GolinHarris reorganized its staff, giving them the new titles of strategists, creators, connectors and catalysts to reflect today's key client needs—creating insights, developing content, connecting with consumers and managing client accounts. The firm created special locations called "bridges," where employees from those different groups could meet to share ideas and listen to the marketplace in real time.

"We have grown out of the earned space," Mr. Cook says. "We used to be 90 percent earned media. We now do a lot of work in the shared space, and we see a big opportunity in the paid space. Our ultimate goal is to be balanced across all types of media, and our organization needs to reflect that."

Colleen Moffitt, co-founder with Jennifer Gehrt of Communiqué PR, Seattle, agrees: "As the PR world has changed, we have come to realize the importance of hiring staff who are well-rounded, flexible and have the ability to thrive with constant change. The campaigns that worked five years ago may not be relevant today. Constant awareness of the media landscape is absolutely necessary to keep ideas fresh and resonant for the media and consumers."

Fleishman-Hillard last year brought key staffers with advertising agency experience into its New York office. The agency's media spending has zoomed from \$6 million to \$100 million and—although not on the scale of a giant ad agency—indicates how Fleishman's portfolio is evolving,

from earned media into the paid sphere as well. Now, Mr. Senay says, he is beginning to talk about client budgets “for the full-fledged PR plan.”

Reflecting how much its business has changed in the world of social media, Fleishman is the social media agency of record for a host of client brands; its 270 digital and social media specialists monitor 173 Facebook presences.

Similarly, Weber Shandwick manages about 150 Facebook or Facebook-like communities. “Two years ago, that was a blip on our radar,” Mr. Diamond says. “We manage, design, create, edit for those sites. We are the opposite of a content owner; we are content providers.”

“We are re-engineering our company,” says Jim Tsokanos, president of MSLGROUP. “If you are going to be the master storyteller, you need content creators and community managers. You need the ability to take a story and execute it across all media. At the same time, you need a client-centric perspective.”

“PR started with the Industrial Age, where companies decided products and benefits for consumers,” he says. “Then we moved into the Information Age and realized the power of data and technology. Now we live in the Conversation Age, where the empowered consumer dictates everything. PR is ready to be in the driver’s seat.”

Here are some of the Big Ideas that PR firms are creating with clients today:



HP

Tariq Hassan knows that people don’t talk about printers at the water cooler.

Mr. Hassan, VP-worldwide marketing and communications for HP’s imaging and printing group, decided his company needed a fresh Big Idea to get consumers—especially the digital generation of young, wired consumers—excited about printers. To do that, the company needed to demonstrate how today’s Web-connected printers, such as the company’s ePrint technology, can be used to share content from virtually anywhere.

“We could triple awareness, but that was not going to solve the problem and get consumers to pull the trigger,” he says. “You need to experience ePrint, specifically to play with it in a way that’s relevant to the opportunity you are in.”

The Big Idea, ePrint Live, was developed with Porter Novelli. Mr. Hassan calls ePrint Live “‘Leno’ meets ‘SNL’ meets Comedy Channel.”

The centerpiece of ePrint Live was a two-hour live improv show last January, starring comedian Rob Riggle and members of the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre.

The show was presented live on YouTube and on HP’s website. Using ePrint technology, viewers could communicate with the performers in real time, sending sketch ideas via emailed photos and text messages that were printed on HP devices on stage. Mr. Riggle pulled ideas off the printer and shot them over to the performers.

The average viewer spends one to three minutes per YouTube session; Mr. Hassan says ePrint Live viewers were averaging 22 minutes watching the comedy unfold. “That’s like watching a TV sitcom!” he says. Nearly 5,000 ideas were submitted during the live show and, over the course of the campaign, the company’s Twitter following grew 350 percent. After the live show, clips from it were posted on YouTube.

“This campaign changed the way we started thinking about the experience; we let the experience form the way the customers come into contact with the technology,” Mr. Hassan says. “The exposure we received vs. the dollar cost was exponentially great.”

He applauds Porter Novelli for “their brilliant idea. It reflects how as an agency they understand that social media is pervasive, that it is a tool in the toolbox that can be leveraged depending on who you want to reach and when.

“For me this campaign is a demonstration of how PR is no longer just about amplification but active participation.”

Philips

For Philips, the Big Idea was found in a small town. A very small, very dark town.

Four years ago Philips launched the first Wake-up Light—a bedside lighting system that, by replicating a natural sunrise, could help people wake up naturally and feel more relaxed. It was a great product, but the company struggled to explain the concept and the benefits to consumers. “When it got to the point of a purchase consideration, people asked if the light really worked,” says Gary Raucher, VP-head of brand and communications for Philips Consumer Lifestyle, Amsterdam. “There was a lot of skepticism.”

The solution was a PR/digital media campaign called “Wake Up the Town.” The Philips team took the Wake-up Light to Longyearbyen, Norway—the most northern town on Earth, whose 2,000 residents live within the Arctic Circle. For 11 weeks of each year, the town lives in “polar night,” meaning it is dark 24 hours a day; and waking up to start the day—without a hint of sunshine—can be physically and mentally challenging.

Philips gave 200 Longyearbyen residents the Wake-up Light to use for three months to see if it helped them wake up and helped them get through their dark days happier and healthier. “It was risky. It was a live social experiment, and we had no idea what the results were going to be,” Mr. Raucher says.

As the test progressed, the residents shared their stories on Facebook and in blog posts; they were interviewed by the media and filmed for mini-documentaries posted on a Philips microsite. When the three months were up, 86 percent of the residents said the light made it easier to get out of bed.

“Wake Up the Town” represented work from Philips’ integrated communications team of agencies and “merged the best of our thinking,” Mr. Raucher says. The effort was led by One Voice, a consortium of Omnicom public relations agencies including Ketchum and Fleishman-Hillard, and Tribal DDB Amsterdam.

“A few years ago, instead of working with a lead agency, we created an integrated team. We believe a Big Idea can come from any discipline, so we gather all our specialist agencies around the table,” Mr. Raucher says. That agnostic approach has been accelerated by the fact that Philips’ marketing communications investments have



shifted dramatically—from 90 percent of spending on traditional TV and print media five years ago, to a quarter of spending in the digital space today. “We merged the best of all the thinking into ‘Wake Up the Town.’”

The spirit of “Wake Up the Town” continues this year, as Philips and its agency partners came up with the next iteration of the Big Idea, “The Philips Wake-up Challenge”: This year they are asking whether the Wake-up Light can turn the world’s worst non-morning people into morning people. Using social media, they have recruited people who call themselves zombies in the morning, those who are unapproachable until the first cup of coffee and those who just can’t get out of bed. The participants will receive a Wake-up Light and tools such as a special app for the iPhone and iPad to track their progress through the dark winter mornings.

Unilever/Degree

Degree for Men was looking for a way to amp up its connection with consumers.

The Unilever line of deodorants/antiperspirants was recreated in 2006, splitting into gender-based Degree for Women and Degree for Men. But, says Senior Brand Building Manager Aaron Calloway, “We were doing OK, but not great. Consumers didn’t know who we were and what we stood for. ... We needed to go where our consumers were,





and engage them in a manner relevant to them.”

Content was the brand’s Big Idea.

“We asked, ‘What if we did a website all about content our guy likes, and use that as our stake in the ground?’” Mr. Calloway says.

Weber Shandwick came up with an idea and a calendar for a dedicated website called the Adrenalist that pushes out content that’s meaningful to Degree’s target younger male consumer—who Mr. Calloway says “likes to get more out of life and enjoys those adrenaline-fueled moments.”

The site brings together news, videos and information on gear and gadgets for the target audience. In addition, the brand partnered with Discovery Channel to have Bear Grylls, star of the network’s “Man vs. Wild,” interview 14 different outdoor enthusiasts in videos that live on the site as “The Adrenalist Lab.”

Degree is also “going where our guys are and driving them to the site,” Mr. Calloway says, with links to the company’s Facebook pages, plus earned media and paid ads online.

The site went live July 29. As of mid-October, TheAdrenalist.com had tallied more than 750,000 unique visitors representing nearly 18,500 hours of engagement.

“Where social media sits within an organization depends on your industry and how consumers interface with your brand,” Mr. Calloway says. “We could have had our ad agency or one of the agencies that do our above-the-line content handle this. But in consumer goods companies like ours, those agencies aren’t as involved in the everyday reactionary conversations with our consumers as a PR firm. If they have the digital capabilities like Weber Shandwick, it becomes a natural fit.”



Wrangler

Think of Wrangler jeans and the image that likely comes to mind is of NFL all-star Brett Favre in a pair—probably in or leaning against a pickup truck.

That indelible image is a wonderful asset for VF Corp.’s Wrangler. But when the brand wanted to reach out beyond its core consumers—to a younger, more metropolitan mindset—it needed a Big Idea.

Enter Next Blue, an online project giving consumers and fledgling designers a chance to create the next style of Wrangler jeans. Working with its PR agency of record, French|West|Vaughn, Wrangler created a microsite that asked consumers to create videos of themselves and their jeans designs. The campaign was promoted through paid, earned and owned media channels during the summer on

Wrangler’s website and Facebook page and in its emails to Wrangler subscribers; with paid ads on Facebook; and with a mix of traditional media relations as well as social media promotion on YouTube and Twitter, allowing the public to comment and vote on the submitted designs.

The point was to engage both current Wrangler wearers plus a new audience. “The heart of the Next Blue project was a brand collaboration with consumers,” says Craig Errington, VP-marketing communications for Wrangler. “That is what our brand was founded on: 60 years ago, rodeo cowboys helped develop our first pairs of jeans.”

One of the challenges was working exclusively through digital channels; the other was a very short two-week time frame for contest submissions. But Wrangler received 50 video submissions in those two weeks. The winning entry, from design student Song Anh Nguyen, will be sold on Wrangler.com as the first design in the Next Blue line.

But in addition to the new design, Wrangler also signed up 19 young designers to blog for its Next Blue site, garnered 5,000 new subscribers to its email database and counted more than 80,000 views of the finalist videos.

“Good ideas can come from anywhere,” Mr. Errington says. “But the best ones, the biggest ideas, are the ones rooted in the deep knowledge of our brand. In social media, you need people who understand the importance of immediacy—the immediate impact, the immediate response, the immediate conversation. French|West|Vaughn has years’ worth of the back and forth with our brand, with the end consumers and with the media. They are trained to engage in that back and forth. Social media is a natural fit for them.” ●

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TOP TRENDS FOR 2012

BY JULIE LIESSE

As public relations firms work with their clients to plan for the coming year, some of the industry's leaders offer their opinions and predictions about social media—10 issues and trends that the marketing community will be talking about in 2012.

1. Engagement will be the key goal for 2012.

The focus in 2012 will be on engagement—not merely “likes,” or fans or followers. “We need to get away from ‘likes’ and fans,” says Bret Werner, managing partner of Catalyst. “There are a lot of brands with heavy fan bases but low engagement—consumers who click to ‘like’ something but never go back to their social network. I hear all the time, ‘I have 1 million fans and my competitor has 1.2 million fans—how do I surpass my competitor?’ The real question is: How do I further engage my consumers?”

2. Your brand will need to be “on” 24/7.

Jennifer Houston, president of Waggener Edstrom's Studio D, tells clients that social media is like “a river that is always on, always flowing—whether or not your boat is in the water. You can't jump in and out of the river.” Too often marketers and agencies have created Facebook pages, Flickr accounts or Twitter handles without an ongoing commitment to maintaining those media with fresh, relevant content. “There is a ton of ‘zombie media’ out there,” she says, which gets in the way of real engagement.

3. The power of consumer influencers will grow.

2012 will see a focus on “consumer influencers” in the social media world—not media personalities, celebrity tweeters or even professional bloggers, but key consumers who wield influence in their communities. “This could be that mom in Oregon who has a passion for a topic, or the local coach who is talking about exercise and fitness. Those average people who tweet or post regularly about a topic and are seen as experts carry a lot of clout in their circles,” Mr. Werner says.

Working with Weber Shandwick, GM's Western Region came up with a novel approach, “Drive thru finals.” GM offered California college students a study break during finals week. Students got \$8 to pick up fast food for a late-night study break—and a borrowed GM car to drive to the restaurant, documenting the excursion on a Flip camera. Ultimately 4,000 students took a test drive in GM cars, posting their videos online and sending photos on their mobile phones. “They might not go out and buy a Chevy tomorrow, but this put us in their consideration set—and they were also calling to recommend that their parents go check out a Chevy,” says Dave Barthmuss, group manager-Western Region and environment, energy and policy communications for GM.

4. Social media will rely increasingly on professionally produced content (not that consumers care).

The content passed along via Facebook, Twitter and You-

Tube will largely be coming from the professionals. “For a while, it seemed that social media content was coming from everyone,” says Weber Shandwick CEO Harris Diamond. “Now what we see is that the content that is being passed along is generally professional content. Two years ago, we would have said something different. But today, it's more likely that consumers are forwarding the newspaper columnist's piece or the professionally done video.”

Says Jonathan Kopp, global director for Ketchum Digital, “To the Internet user, it is all content. People are starting to lose the distinction between whether they are reading The New York Times or what a friend has passed on.”

5. It will be more difficult to tell what is paid media vs. earned or shared.

Likewise, Mr. Kopp says, “There is a similar blurring between paid and unpaid content in digital media.” There are paid opportunities on most social platforms now, including Twitter. For marketers, he says, that means “the important thing is to be in all streams—paid, earned, shared and owned—so the message is heard.”

One expert says it's no longer enough to launch a social media campaign—now companies must support that with paid ads on those platforms as well.

Says Michael Bassik, managing director and U.S. digital practice chairman at Burson-Marsteller, “It used to be the case that there was the first-mover advantage just by having a presence in social media. But now if a company is going to launch a campaign on Facebook or Twitter, we tell them it is a best practice to advertise on those platforms as well because they need to—the mere novelty of social media has vanished.”

6. Brands will search for opportunities to market in the moment.

Clients will look to PR firms to identify real-time marketing and engagement opportunities. Think of it as marketing in the moment and owning the conversation of the day.

Jeff Beringer, executive director-digital and connector community leader for GolinHarris, says, “A lot of brands have not figured out the opportunities to create content and reach consumers in real time.” Recently GolinHarris worked with longtime client McDonald's Corp.

to market in the moment. In September, the agency's social media listeners noticed a “fast-food addiction” trending topic on Twitter about what fast foods consumers can't live without—and that McDonald's french fries were mentioned half the time. The McDonald's team jumped on it, creating a graphic that it tweeted out to followers repeating the poll numbers and thanking fans for “lovin' it.” “It was a great opportunity to shine a light on something that was happening that very day,” Mr. Beringer says. “But it was a fleeting opportunity that would have been gone in 24 hours.”

7. Communications strategies will need to change for mobile consumers.

As smartphone penetration hits 50 percent in the U.S., the use of the mobile Internet will become at least as important as desktop Internet usage. That means social media strategies and criteria will need to be adjusted. For instance, Porter Novelli CEO Gary Stockman points out that with the mobile Web, stickiness becomes less important, but bringing consumers back more frequently is key. Brand teams will need to re-evaluate how to engage consumers on the go.

8. Clients and agencies will continue to search for good, common metrics for social media efforts.

“Measurement is going to continue to be on clients' minds,” says Mr. Beringer of GolinHarris. “We continue to search for common measurement criteria. What are the criteria we are going to use to evaluate social media? Right now, every campaign, every agency has a different way of measuring.”

He says often the agencies are pushing clients for measurement tools—“We are the people who are signing paychecks and allocating budgets.” He points to campaigns like Procter & Gamble Co.'s much-discussed efforts for Old Spice, which have generated more than 37 million views on YouTube. “It was a ton of engagement, but did it move product? Those sorts of discussions will continue in 2012.”

9. Companies will work to globally integrate their digital presences.

As social media tools have zoomed in popularity, many companies now find that they have websites, Facebook pages, Twitter handles and blogs that look and sound different from market to market, country to country.

Cricket Wardein, who leads Edelman's U.S. digital group, says, “One of the main things we are working at is integrating all the social channels globally. Just like 10 years

ago we might have been working to integrate brand messages across disciplines, now we are doing the same for social media. Every social media campaign is a global campaign—there are no country boundaries in social media. Everything has to be integrated.”

10. More client companies will bring the social media function in-house.

As marketers wrestle with how to manage social media, more companies are choosing to bring control of social media in-house. But that frequently means agencies are helping their clients structure the function.

“The biggest factor that impacts agencies today is the internalization of social media strategy,” says Burson-Marsteller's Mr. Bassik. “That shift challenges agencies to provide even more useful services to clients.” ●



Jennifer Houston



Michael Bassik

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EXPANDING EXPERTISE

BY MATTHEW SCHWARTZ

In an increasingly globalized economy, public relations firms recognize that to drive their clients' overall marketing strategy—and have a bigger impact on the bottom line—they need to raise the bar on content creation, brand management and digital analytics, and are hiring to meet the demands of this changing landscape.

Public relations firms are recruiting people who don't fit the traditional PR mold, everyone from consumer-marketing specialists, digital strategists and technology experts to financial experts, attorneys—and even chefs.

"It's bringing in people who are closest to the knowledge and information, and providing real business acumen, which allows us to engage better, deeper," says Gail Heimann, vice chairwoman of Weber Shandwick. "A seat at the table is all about having the right strategy, and having the right strategy is born of having the right intellectual capacity at the table."

She should know: Weber Shandwick's scientific communications practice has 22 full-time specialists, including 17 Ph.D.s, while the firm's food issues practice now has 50 trained chefs and 17 dietitians on staff. It's also expanded its ability to produce and manage content by developing a global network of more than 300 strategists, community managers, producers, developers, bloggers and syndication and analytics experts.

Whether through changing their entire business model, creating new practices or augmenting existing practices with counselors closer to the subject at hand, public relations firms are expanding beyond their traditional skill sets (read: media relations and execution) by adding experts in other areas who can add more value to their services.

"I don't want to be looked at as a publicity shop," says Tony Signore, CEO-managing partner, Taylor Global, who in the last several years has led the transformation of his company from a traditional public relations firm that strictly catered to the sports field to a strategic marketing communications company.

In late 2006, Taylor set aside \$1.9 million to hire people with a nontraditional background for its 100-person shop, Mr. Signore says. By 2012, he plans to have an employee ratio of 60/40 traditional PR executives to people with more disparate skills.

Brand, digital strategists

Many of the new employees—recruited from companies such as consultant Booz Allen Hamilton, ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide and research and analysis consultant Yankelovich Inc.—work in Taylor's brand counsel group. The group, launched in 2010, consists of brand planners, consumer-insight specialists, creative directors and digital strategists.

In 2010, NASCAR asked Taylor to move beyond its traditional public relations services by conducting a strategic assessment of the motorsports landscape. The review re-

sulted in the creation of an integrated marketing communications department within NASCAR.

"It's been a sea change in philosophy about the role and responsibility of our communications group to one that is far more strategic, and it goes past our core business to all of the stakeholders and all of our functional areas," says Steve Phelps, CMO of NASCAR.

"Taylor provided an in-depth look at what our industry needed to do as we look to grow our sport," he adds. "We thought they provided great value to an entire industry."

In addition to cultivating expertise in-house, PR firms are acquiring companies that specialize in various aspects of media production and distribution.

Take WCG, which in 2009 acquired both creative services firm ODA and Common Sense Media, a social media consulting company founded by Bob Pearson, who was previously VP-communities and conversations at Dell Inc.

"More than half of the world learns by visuals, and our growing creative capabilities have helped us to offer clients different ways in which to tell their stories that are more

creative and more impactful," says Jim Weiss, chairman-CEO of WCG, whose clients include Hershey Co. as well as several healthcare companies and pharmaceutical brands. "The social and digital analytics pioneered by Common Sense helps us maximize the opportunity for the client and target and measure more effectively in ways that we weren't able to do before."

The rise of social media has played into public relations' inherent role of storytelling. However, the onus is now on public relations firms to deploy the digital-media specialists who can meld a social marketing campaign with a client's overall goals and objectives.

"We're looking for people who are great storytellers, strong writers, strong communicators, but [who] then also bring this knowledge of the variety of digital platforms that are available to us," says Brooke Hovey who in September was named to the new position of exec VP-digital practice, Americas, at Cohn & Wolfe.

Cohn & Wolfe's digital media practice, which debuted in 2006, has about 55 people working globally, with specialists in social media, influencer engagement, digital analytics and measurement, design, user interface and other disciplines.

Last February, the firm helped launch a social media strategy for Sam's Club, a division of Walmart Stores. Cohn & Wolfe provided advice about internal policies, developed social media training sessions and designed a new approach to integrating PR and digital media measurement.

In addition to measuring key performance indicators related to awareness and reputation, such as volume and sentiment of online conversations, Cohn & Wolfe is also helping Sam's Club measure financial KPIs, such as the impact of social content on sales.

"Within the world of digital, we're seeing a need for integration of people and teams with specific expertise—our SEO and e-commerce marketing teams, our email and text teams, our mobile team [and] our firm partners," says Christi Davis Gallagher, director of brand reputation at Sam's Club. "It's critical that we're all coordinated to drive the greatest impact."

C-level expertise

As digital media gets closer to the core of marketing communications, PR firms will need people who can properly frame the issue for the C-suite and put the ever-growing

David Witt

Director, global digital marketing and brand PR,
The Hershey Co.
2012 Word of Mouth Marketing Association Board Chair



It's been a marketer's dream to speak one-to-one with consumers where and when appropriate. The changes in media and technology, particularly the advent of social media, have changed the role of the consumer in the marketing environment where they are more in charge of what they receive, creating

an incredibly positive opportunity for companies and brands.

PR practitioners have the skills to build one-to-one relationships at scale, and PR has always been about ideas and identifying the right intellectual and emotional currency to engage effectively with key stakeholders. That's especially valuable in this new environment. PR pros have the innate ability to know what's newsworthy, relevant and remarkable, making them ideally suited to develop content needed to engage with consumers who can build valuable, sustainable relationships with brands.

Because content is such an important element in consumer engagement, brands have to think like producers and publishers: What content can get and hold the consumer's attention over time? Particularly with respect to social media directed at consumers, brands

have to think: "What can I give?" not just "What can I get?"

People will seek out and stay loyal to brands with which they have a strong emotional connection. We have been implementing this way on Reese's, for example, and as a result now have more than 8 million engaged fans on Facebook.

To operate in this ever-changing media environment, we are purposefully working with firms that we view as more holistic strategic communications partners. While increasingly integral and well-suited to help us develop stronger social media capabilities, we also judge an agency partner on analytics, strategy, creativity and execution. They have to be able to dive deep at the front end and find out how consumers are talking about our brands, who's leading the conversation and what opportunities they afford the brand.

Firms we work with bring analytical skills that really are differential and also help us measure how we are doing along the way to guide real-time adjustments.

The best firms are starting to view and organize themselves as strategic marketers even though they may operate under a PR umbrella or at least started there. Some focus on a particular industry, adding talent such as registered dietitians or attorneys. Others take a broader view. Regardless of how they come at it, they need to be current with or ahead of new technology and media to help us execute impactful word-of-mouth marketing and awareness programs that bring sustained and measurable value.

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number of digital platforms in a business context.

“What we’ve been particularly effective at with the C-level is helping people to understand the difference between smoke and fire,” says Andrew Bleeker, global digital practice director at Hill & Knowlton, who joined the PR firm in January and works with such global brands as Deloitte and Qualcomm.

Mr. Bleeker brings to the table several years’ experience both in digital communications and public policy. Before joining Hill & Knowlton, he was the principal of Bully Pulpit Interactive, a digital marketing firm he founded in 2008 after running the online marketing strategy for Barack Obama’s presidential campaign.

“One of the questions I get most frequently from the

C-level is, ‘Something happened and folks are talking about it online, and is this something I need to care about?’” he says.

“I haven’t seen much difference between a financial services CEO and a tech CEO. They have the same questions. They’re both trying to be analytical about the influence of a conversation in digital media, and they both feel that, frankly, the tools in the marketplace aren’t helping them answer the questions. That’s one of the reasons why we’re investing in bringing in a very nontraditional talent set.”

Matt Makovsky graduated this spring with an M.B.A. from Columbia University. Soon after graduating he was named assistant VP at Makovsky & Co., where he currently works across the public relations firm’s technology, branding and interactive practices.

“The M.B.A. helps in my approach to all the different touch points of the business: the client’s overall business and strategy, the approach to sales and marketing and even product development,” Mr. Makovsky says. “It’s having a conversation at a much deeper level about the business implications and seeing how that will inform the communications.”

Government knowledge

The growing range of specialization in PR has a familiar ring to Margery Kraus, founder and CEO of APCO Worldwide, whose clients include six of the top 10 companies on the Fortune 500 list.

“Balance has always been fundamental to the DNA of APCO,” Ms. Kraus says. “It’s effected a very practical approach to problem solving, which requires having diversity and a diversity of interests.”

Ms. Kraus points to a meeting with a prospective client who was eager to enter the U.S. federal homeland security market. During the meeting, APCO had several full-time employees sitting at the table, including an attorney, an executive specializing in foreign investment in the U.S. and a former member of Congress who concentrates on foreign trade issues.

“The response we got from the potential client from that meeting was, ‘This has been enormously helpful because you have raised issues that have helped me think about things differently,’” Ms. Kraus says.

Media, content pros

Having a diverse talent pool—with an almost laserlike focus on producing content—is fueling the recent changes at public relations firm LaunchSquad, which caters to start-up companies.

For example, in 2010 the firm hired veteran journalist Jeff Davis as editorial director. Mr. Davis, a former executive editor at BNET, is helping grow the firm’s content offerings through multiple media channels, says Brett Weiner, a partner at LaunchSquad.

In 2009, LaunchSquad brought in Brett Marty, a documentary filmmaker and professional photographer, as creative director to handle the growing demand among clients for online video programming.

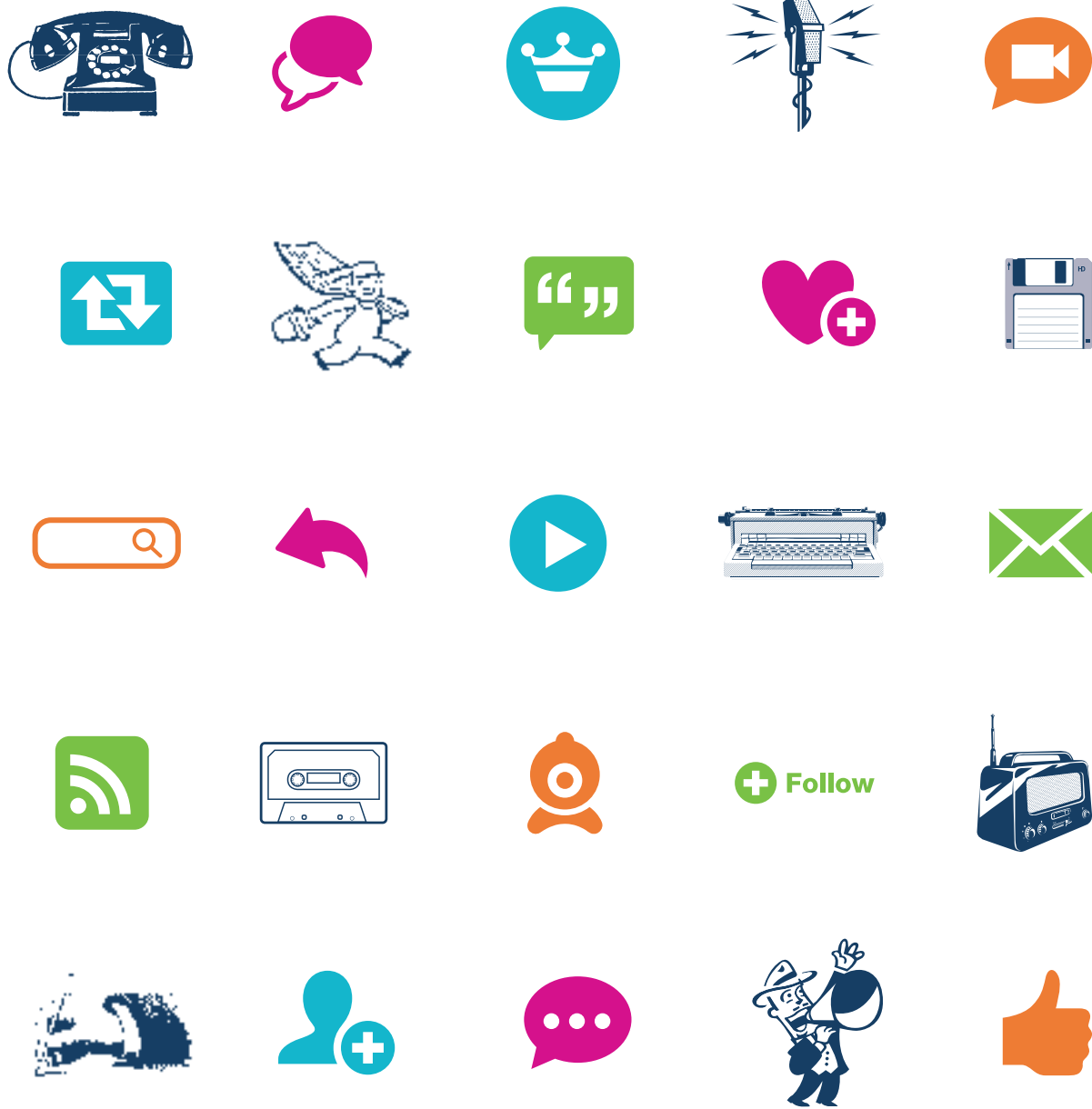
Online video is expected to be a growing element of TheSmartVan.com, a website that LaunchSquad created earlier this year for ServiceMax, which provides field service management software.

“The story idea is the key thing,” says Jeremy Frank, marketing and community manager of ServiceMax. “There are lots of channels out there, and I think it falls on PR now to figure out where the best channels are to spread those stories.” ●

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CAMPAIGNS FOR A CAUSE

BY NANCY GIGES

Corporate social responsibility is rapidly becoming a key component of today's marketing plans; but for many years, companies weren't getting much credit for all the good they were doing. That's changing as marketers realize the value of CSR and engage public relations professionals to help them expand efforts to embrace a strategy that goes far beyond just handing out money.

When it comes down to it, CSR is a natural fit for public relations, says Mike Swenson, president, Barkley PR/Cause. "At its core, PR is about creating opportunities for a brand to interact with its audiences and create credibility and a positive feeling about the brand," he says. "Nothing says credibility more than a brand that is operating as a good corporate citizen."

Luke Lambert, president of Gibbs & Soell Public Relations, agrees: "An organization builds trust every time it makes a promise to its community and keeps that promise. Those promises become part of a broad social vision."

PR is the discipline that helps organizations maintain ongoing dialogues with all their constituencies in both local and global communities. It uses the communication function to "map the assets, streamline an offer, develop positioning and messaging" for resources deployed across a company, says Kristen Spensieri, CSR leader, Chandler Chicco Cos.

Two words key to managing a reputation are authenticity and transparency, says Annie Longworth, global sustainability practice leader, Cohn & Wolfe, and that's what PR is all about.

Tara Greco, senior VP-head of North America corporate responsibility practice, APCO Worldwide, agrees. "What all stakeholders are looking for is transparency in communications, not just telling them all the good things but everything related to a business ... about how you are interacting with the environment, what your social objectives are and how that connects to your business objectives."

Tactical initiatives are also becoming more focused, as companies choose signature programs and dedicate more resources to a single, narrower effort.

To get an overview of the kinds of programs and expertise public relations firms are offering in this critical area, here's a roundup of campaigns:

CSR in Action at Tom's of Maine

Engaging people in doing good work in communities across the country has been an integral part of the Tom's of Maine business since the shoe company was founded 41 years ago. "Volunteerism is part of Tom's of Maine's DNA," says Susan Dewhirst, the company's PR and goodness programs manager.

Three years ago, Tom's turned to Cohn & Wolfe to help it involve its core consumers even more. The result: 50 States for Good, an annual program that just award-

ed \$150,000 to six nonprofits. The program is open to smaller, grassroots nonprofit organizations that mobilize community volunteers to have a local impact. From 20 semifinalists, the public votes for the winner. The top nonprofit is awarded \$50,000 and five runners-up each receive \$20,000.

The program has been very successful. "People love our company when they know about us, and we know this is helping us raise brand awareness," Ms. Dewhirst says. In fact, in the 12 months ended Aug. 31, Tom's of Maine increased household penetration by 29 percent, with 50 States for Good a key factor in that.

CSR in Action at P&G

MSLGROUP'S work with Procter & Gamble Co. is what Scott Beaudoin, senior VP-group director, Beyond Purpose, and North America director-cause marketing and CSR, MSLGROUP Boston, calls "purpose-inspired marketing."

Kori Reed
VP-Foundation and Cause
ConAgra Foods



We've been working with Fleishman-Hillard for more than five years, starting with the philanthropic area. ConAgra Foods and the ConAgra Foods Foundation have been silent partners in the child hunger space since 1993; however, we wanted to bridge the foundation's philanthropic work, which we see as an investment

in the community, and the work the ConAgra Foods brands do to get consumers involved in child hunger. That's where the [PR] agency comes in—to connect the dots.

With the help of Fleishman-Hillard, ConAgra Foods can tell the story of our collective efforts and tie everything together for a stronger story with a bigger impact. For example, Hunger-Free Summer is a foundation activity we've been engaged in for the past two years to provide more meals to children during the summer months when school is out and they have reduced access to nutritious meals. It's part of the foundation's \$10 million, five-year commitment to Feeding America.

"Child Hunger Ends Here" is a brand campaign that is separate and distinct from the ConAgra Foods Foundation. The cam-

All P&G brands now have a purpose statement, he says, driving a more strategic way of factoring social responsibility and cause marketing into their businesses.

For example, Dawn's "Everyday wildlife champions" umbrella grew out of the discovery by animal rescuers some 35 years ago that Dawn was an excellent cleaner to use on animals that had been involved in oil spills. That discovery fit perfectly with the dish detergent's tough-on-grease-yet-safe positioning. Since then, P&G has contributed millions of dollars to wildlife organizations.

In its most recent program with MSLGROUP, P&G is using the Dawn Facebook fan page to support the movement by providing information about wildlife conservation. It also contributes \$1 to wildlife organizations for each bottle of Dawn purchased. The page has generated more than 18,000 fans, 312,000 impressions and "significant" consumer engagement and feedback.

CSR in Action at Green Mountain Coffee Roasters

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters has long been an advocate of fair trade, a marketing approach that helps producers in developing countries improve trading conditions while promoting sustainability.

"Fair trade is important to us because we feel that the highest-quality coffees come from the communities with the highest quality of life," says Sandy Yusen, PR director for Green Mountain. "It's part of delivering to our consumers, who are coffee lovers, the best possible coffee in a socially responsible way."

This year, Green Mountain turned to Cone to help it tell consumers about the positive impact they can have by buying fair trade coffee using Fair Trade Coffee Month in October. Cone identified two musicians who are passionate about the issue, Michael Franti and Grace Potter, and engaged them to give exclusive live performances on Green Mountain's Facebook page.

"Cone helped us crystallize the concept and focus on how we can make a difference and achieve our goal" of broader awareness, Ms. Yusen says.

CSR in Action at UPS

APCO's work with United Parcel Service of America over the past 20 years illustrates how a CSR strategy evolves as a company evolves. When UPS was privately held and mostly

campaign runs during the school year and, during the fall months, [it] gets consumers engaged by collecting ConAgra Foods UPCs and helping host or participate in school-sponsored drives to collect food that will be donated to local food banks. During the spring months the campaign encourages consumers to enter a product code, which in turn triggers a donation.

While these are separate and distinct activities managed by different internal teams, they are related to the same cause and connected under the broader umbrella of our social responsibility platform—Good for You, Good for the Community and Good for the Planet.

The key is how we tell our story in a holistic way. We engaged our agency to help us drive awareness of our commitment.

Fleishman-Hillard has helped us authentically leverage our assets against child hunger in America. As a company, ConAgra Foods donated 1 million meals a month last year through our partner, Feeding America, and the "Child Hunger Ends Here" campaign engaged consumers to deliver an additional 2.5 million meals. In addition, the ConAgra Foods Foundation invested millions of dollars in the child hunger space.

The agency helps us tell a more robust story about our efforts in a much more holistic way. They're able to look at the best practices in the landscape and find the social media, celebrity management and traditional media that are right for us. They continue to refresh the story and keep the word out there about our work in the child hunger space.



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