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## INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

# How to Raise Employee Engagement via Product Experiences and Strategic Communication

This week's top story discusses how to motivate employees, build an emotional connection to your brand within them and eventually make them enthusiastic brand advocates.

Warning: The following may strike some as crude examples, but they're meant to be illustrative only. Can there be any better example of an employee with an emotional connection to his job than assistant football coach **Aaron Feis**, who shielded students from bullets during last week's terrible incident at **Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School** in S. Florida? A Douglas grad, Feis was described as having great pride and loyalty toward the school and its students. Feis displayed his emotional connection this past Valentine's Day and paid with his life.

On the other hand, members of gymnastics and Olympics governing bodies who allegedly ignored and/or downplayed complaints of misconduct against **Dr. Larry Nassar** would seem to be examples of employees without an emotional connection to their jobs.



**Amanda Atkins**  
 Head of Internal Communications  
 Slack

For **Amanda Atkins**, head of internal communications at **Slack**, a cloud-based workflow solution, employees with an emotional connection "are proud...[and] passionate and have skin in the game...they feel they're a part of something bigger than themselves. It's much more than coming to work and collecting a paycheck." The way they talk about your product and company to the rest of the world is "grounded in those emotions."



**Jessica Bauer**  
 Internal Communications Manager  
 Dropbox

Adds **Jessica Bauer**, internal communications manager at **Dropbox**, emotional connections go beyond creating social advocates of your employees. Based on research, she says, emotionally engaged employees are more productive, increase retention and reduce turnover. Such employees also lead to increased sales and profits, not to mention bettering a company's reputation, which helps when attracting top-tier talent.

### Disengaged at Work

**33%:** U.S. employees who say they're engaged at work

**20%:** U.S. employees who say they're managed in a way that motivates them to do great work

**13%:** U.S. employees who strongly agree that the leadership of their organization communicates effectively with the rest of the organization

Source: Gallup, State of the American Workplace (February 2017)

### GETTING STARTED

OK, how do you instill these emotions in employees? Atkins and Bauer emphasize different thrusts. Atkins points to the following:

- ▶ **Hands-on Experiences:** Depending on the industry you're in, employees can familiarize themselves with products before they're released to the public. This can motivate employees to want to get behind a product, she says, again,

Continued on page 2



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## UPCOMING EVENTS AND WEBINARS

**WEBINAR: HOW TO  
ELEVATE YOUR PITCHES  
FOR CLICK-HUNGRY  
JOURNALISTS**  
**FEBRUARY 21, 2018**  
 1:30-3:00PM ET

**THE SOCIAL  
MEDIA SUMMIT**  
**FEBRUARY 22-23, 2018**  
 HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

**SPRING AWARDS  
LUNCHEON**  
**(HONORING THE CSR  
AND NONPROFIT  
AWARDS)**  
**MARCH 20, 2018**  
 NEW YORK CITY

Continued from page 1

# Use Storytelling to Engage Employees

creating a feeling that the employee is part of something larger than himself or herself.

She gives the example of a program at **Victoria's Secret** where employees, friends and families were encouraged to sample products before they were sold to the public. A former employee there, Atkins says each product was sent to the employee's desk via an inter-office envelope. "It was like Christmas Day when one of those envelopes arrived," Atkins says, recalling that employees would gather around the recipient's desk to ogle and compare experiences.

The program was an excellent way to create an emotional connection in employees, particularly for those without product-facing jobs, such as IT workers.

► **Product Input and Feedback:** As in the above, with the product in employees' hands before release, their input and feedback should be solicited, she says. "This can build a personal connection."

► **Personal Experiences:** Perhaps you have an employee with a very long tenure, or one who's contributing in a unique way or who has a fascinating story. "Being able to pull out these stories and share them broadly builds positive emotional connections for the entire employee base." This makes employees feel that they're part of a robust, diverse, exciting team that's responsible for putting good into the world, she adds.

► **Customer Connections:** This can be big, particularly in industries that, on the surface, seem to lack excitement. For example, Atkins mentions working for **Liberty Mutual Insurance** before joining Slack. "Getting employees excited about [an insurance] product, especially one they don't work with directly can be a challenge." The solution was relaying stories where

customers' lives were rebuilt with the insurer's help after disasters, she says. Putting such stories together for employees makes them realize the importance of what the company does and that's reflected in how they speak about the brand to the public, she says.

► **Storytelling:** Atkins stresses it's not merely telling stories about what your product is, but what it does to help people's lives, perhaps how it changes their lives. This again can help staff see beyond the borders of their day-to-day job.

► **Creativity:** Atkins admits some products are more conducive to this approach than others, however, with creativity "I guarantee" you can find examples and stories that will help build emotional connections within employees, she says.

## Forums for feedback and input



**Stewart** 29 days ago

As a frequent traveler: please!



**Ali** 29 days ago

I agree with this, but: using the iOS setting to do this automatically has been A++ for me while I travel. I always open my phone first anyway; by the time I'm at my desktop, it's already correct.

Why don't we flip that on by default?



**f** 28 days ago

Dang, that's a good idea. Also: **TIL** about the iOS setting.



**ayesha** 26 days ago

I took this to [#feat-availability](#), we'll flip that setting on by default.



**f** 1:23 PM

**What?** Letting Slack Desktop detect timezones and ask if the user wants to update them.  
**Why?** Other apps (Google Calendar, Trello, etc) do this and frequent travellers end up with important notifications snoozed at the wrong time of day. For customers, "it's quite a lot of effort both to remember that Slack doesn't handle this and then to go digging around for timezone settings each time".

Slack Solution: In an area dedicated to employee comments, staffer "f" (above) notes a timezone issue with Slack. The CEO (Stewart, top) agrees; the problem is quickly solved in a public forum, allowing employees to see their input counts.  
 Source: SLACK

## EXAMPLES AT SLACK

Atkins puts many of the above suggestions into practice at Slack. For example, all of the company's employees use Slack—email is not used—in beta or alpha and they're encouraged to submit comments on what's working for them and what's not via a dedicated feedback channel.

More than that, employees from "anywhere in the company" can bring up an idea based on their experience or what a customer is telling him/her and can see the result of their input.

As you can see in the graphic at the bottom of page 2, an employee "f" mentions in a dedicated channel that a Slack product lacks time zone adjustments and so frequent travelers need to amend their appointments when they move across the globe. By the way, the commenter at the top of the conversation identified as "Stewart" is Slack CEO Stewart Butterfield (photo page 1), who says he, too, is frustrated with the timezone situation since he's a frequent traveler.

While the issue is resolved via a tech fix, the more important thing for this discussion is that the employee sees that his/her input resulted in a better product. (How many times have your opinions been solicited at work or elsewhere and you've seen the results of your input?)

## BOUNDARIES

Now that your employees are building their emotional connections to your company and its products, it's critical to make sure they have guardrails within which they can share socially. For example, make sure it's clear when something is ready to be shared, such as an embargoed announcement. It's best to include a reminder about embargoes at the top of an announcement, Atkins says.

Another tip: repackage internal videos, photos, etc., so employees can share them publically. This provides employees with the messages you want "out there the way you prefer" them shared and makes it easier for them to be advocates, Atkins says. There are platforms dedicated to this, such as **Social Chorus**. Of course, you could share this material via email or intranet, too.

## COMMUNICATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES

For Dropbox's Bauer, one of the key contributors to creating the kind of engagement that leads to employee advocates

## Communication is key



**"What if, and I know this sounds kooky, we communicated with the employees."**

Source: Adam Bryant

is communication. Employees want to hear about company goals and how they are contributing to the firm's success, she says. In general, the more informed employees are, the better they feel about where the business is headed. While communicating with employees seems an obvious tactic, it's considered one of the more difficult assignments for PR pros.

Bauer faced these challenges in October, when Dropbox unveiled a rebrand aimed at emphasizing that the brand had moved beyond offering storage only to also providing workflow solutions. The rebrand also featured a redesign, incorporating a lot more color into its template.

The first step in communicating this effort to employees was deciding on goals. The goals were driving awareness and excitement among Dropbox employees globally.

It was decided to take a who, what, where, when and why approach. This meant making certain Dropboxers were provided context about why the redesign was needed and how and why it would matter to each employee, ie, why should I care about this? When, also was key, Bauer says. "You don't want employees finding out things" via press announcements. "You want them hearing it from the company, perhaps their manager," before it becomes public, she says.

Continued on page 4

**Enter Now!**

ENTRY DEADLINE:  
**May 4, 2018**

LATE DEADLINE:  
**May 11, 2018**

Questions? Contact  
Mary-Lou French at  
mfrench@accessintel.com

## PRNews' Platinum Awards 2018

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Enter Online: [prnew.se/platinum-18](http://prnew.se/platinum-18)

### 3-4 WEEKS

A tip: Timing is key. Mention a key event too early to employees and it might leak out to the public; mention it too late and you risk being unable to fully communicate it to staff. Bauer says Dropbox found “the sweet spot” to begin unveiling details to employees was 3-4 weeks prior to the redesign’s public debut.

When it comes to the best channel to announce a launch internally, there’s no one correct answer, she argues. For Dropbox, the best venue was during All Hands, a meeting held 1-2 times per month. “This also gave our executives air time in front of our employees,” particularly the CEO.

But Dropbox also had backups for employees who were unable to attend or listen in to the All Hands. So on launch day, a company-wide email memo was sent from the company’s CMO meant to reinforce the messaging, share assets employees could use and to increase excitement internally.

### THE CASCADE

Before any of this occurred, though, a communications cascade was created, Bauer says. Chiefly this meant making sure all information was ready to be released effectively via the All Hands and later the CMO memo. To do this, she says, key mid-level personnel in all functions, who could help effectively explain the rebrand, were chosen as message ambassadors.

Spokespeople led briefings about the rebrand for the ambassadors. These sessions included frequently asked questions and talking points they could use to explain the rebrand to their teams. “We also gave them clear expectations about how and when they should reinforce the messaging within their organizations.

It’s important to note, though, Bauer considered these briefing sessions with ambassadors a “two-way street.” While “we communicated our messages” about the rebrand, “we also heard questions and concerns” the ambassadors felt their teams would raise. This helped communicators ready themselves “when the rebrand was rolled out” broadly to the full company.

### INCLUSIVE AND FUN

Other parts of the cascade included having regional executives in 12 countries where Dropbox has employees host live satellite hook-ups of the All Hands. The executives not only preceded the All Hands with remarks, they also took questions after it was over, allowing the creation of a local take on the rebrand, she says. “We couldn’t contextualize what the redesign would mean for the office in Tokyo” as well as a Tokyo-based executive could.

Bauer also notes communicators considered the All Hands a campaign in itself, advertising it with a mix of factual and fun elements, including posters and stickers. Additional fun came through tee-shirts and SWAG, she says, as well as providing budgets for offices to hold celebrations around the rebrand. “We also provided images that they could share on their social pages and desktop background.”

Once the All Hands occurred, communicators’ work wasn’t done, Bauer says. A few days later there was another company-wide session solely for employees to raise questions and comments about the rebrand.

In addition communications designed messages to be sent periodically that provided news to employee about the redesign, including a monthly newsletter and a quarterly update during later All Hands. “Repetition is important,” Bauer says, to emphasize that the rebrand announcement “wasn’t just a moment in time...it’s a long haul” operation.

Other activities related to the rebrand, she says, will include “fireside chats” where the CMO will visit several locations, such as engineering and sales, which will re-emphasize the brand messaging and to answer questions.

The communications team will be measuring the results of the communications effort around the rebrand, Bauer says, and has prepared surveys for the All Hands and other sessions. She also gathers information informally via relationships she has made with managers in various Dropbox locations. ■

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## FAKE NEWS

# Marketers Know Ads Near Fake News Can Hurt a Brand But Seem Reluctant to Change Things

With the indictments of 13 Russians and 3 companies last week in the special investigation into foreign meddling with the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the topic of fake news on social platforms such as **Facebook** likely will dominate the news this week (see related item on page 8).

While fake content on social platforms is a major portion of the story, online advertising also plays a large role. A survey from the **Society for New Communications Research of The Conference Board** shows few marketers know where their ads are running (see pie chart on next page).

The culprit, they say, is programmatic advertising, or ad

tech, which tags and follows consumers across the internet.

In addition the survey of more than 100 advertisers, marketers and social media managers, conducted between August and November 2017, shows marketers are aware that their ads could run adjacent to fake news. The survey also seems to show marketers understand having ads appear near fake news could tarnish their brand.

The issue is few marketers know what to do about this potential issue and are reluctant to change their business practices, says **Jeff Pundyk**, an SNCR Fellow and author of the survey.

When asked who should lead in solving the problem, the marketers said publishers and the social media platforms (see bar graph below).

To help survey participants understand the meaning of fake news and assist them in making their responses to the questions more accurate, SNCR used the following definition of fake news for survey purposes: “Content that lacks trusted sources and often uses sensational headlines to encourage the consumption and spread of unverified or false information. It can be left- or right- leaning. Such content typically masquerades as legitimate news reports—and is often supported by ads, sometimes without the knowledge of the advertiser.”

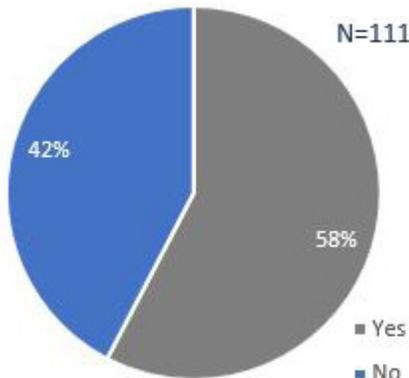
Some 80% of respondents say they would “probably” or “definitely” reduce their level of spending with partners that include unreliable sites, yet they are ambivalent about joining private markets, closed exchanges that include only known and vetted sites.

### RELUCTANT TO CHANGE

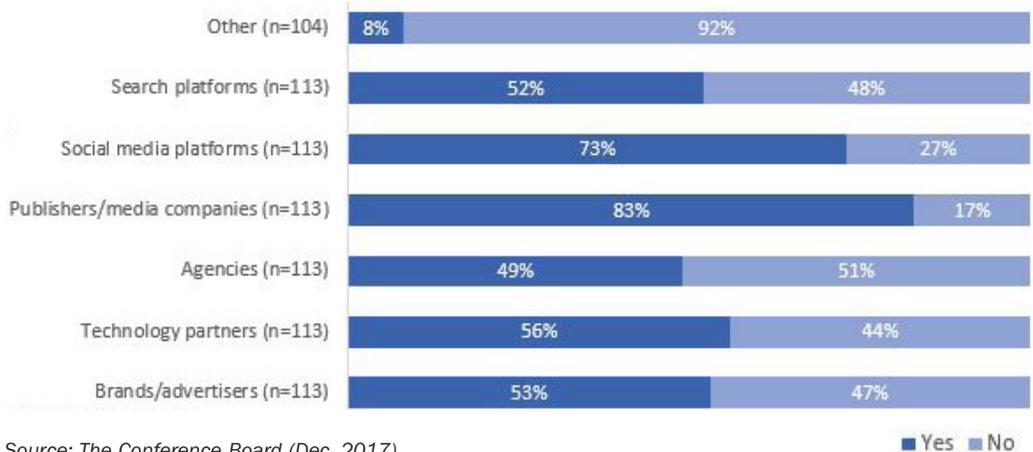
The respondents were nearly 50-50 on returning to direct relationships with brand-safe publishers, with 46% saying they “probably” would return to premium publishers and 30% saying they were unsure.

“Advertising models...have created a murky underbelly of misinformation that is threatening our most valuable brands, communities, and democratic institutions,” says Jen McClure, SNCR’s founder and chair of the Advisory Board. It’s critical to understand the negative consequences before the problem can be addressed, she adds. ■

### Do you know all the publications at which your advertising runs?



### Who should take the lead in solving the problem of “fake news” as it relates to advertising?



Source: The Conference Board (Dec. 2017)

### Fake News and Marketers

**87%:** Respondents who believe it is moderately likely to very likely that programmatic advertising could place sponsors next to fake news content

**88%:** Respondents who believe adjacency to fake news could be problematic for an advertiser, with 95% of those marketers believing it erodes customer trust in the brand

**59%:** Cite native advertising or paid content marketing as the source of fake news

**Nearly 70%:** Those who say they have seen fake news on digital or social channels within the past month of them taking the survey

**More than 80%:** Those who say if their ads appear adjacent to fake news, their brands will be harmed by the affiliation

**70%:** Those who have a negative or very negative impression of the advertiser in those positions

Source: SNCR Survey, The Conference Board (Dec. 2017)

### SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDEBOOK

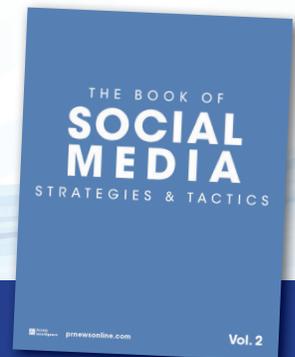
In PR News’ Social Media Guidebook, the challenges of planning, executing and measuring successful social media campaigns are met with eight chapters on everything from Snapchat to live streaming to blogging.

#### Chapters include:

- Measuring and Communicating Social Success
- Facebook
- Snapchat
- Live Streaming

**PRNews**

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# Brands Urged to Speak Out on Important Issues but Also Treat Employees Well

APCO spent 6 months asking 1,000 of what it called “hyper-aware and influential U.S. consumers” how much credence they put in corporate social responsibility.

As you might expect, 90% of those surveyed for *Corporate Advocacy in Five Acts* said they expect brands to be involved in addressing society’s most challenging concerns.

The question, of course, is what issues should a brand address? In short, APCO recommends finding an issue by starting with what you’re good at and known for. “You’ll build advocacy, credibility, and also reinforce your brand identity in the public mind,” it says. And 89% agreed that “companies should support social issues that are consistent with their business focus and expertise.” In other words, stay in your lane.

But note, the differences between issues CEOs should speak out about differ depending on political affiliation (see bar chart, top).

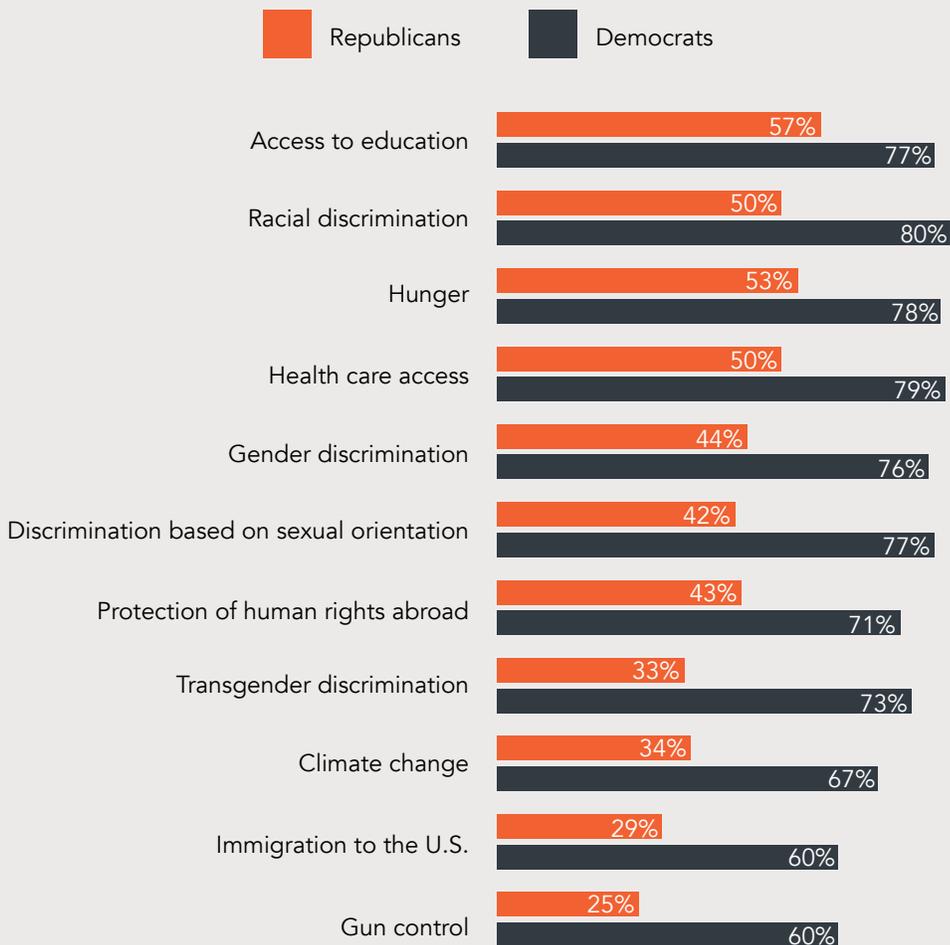
The survey also found actions speak louder than words...and money. 77% said they admire a company that “uses its business interests and expertise to address a social issue.” Just 23% said they admire a company that “donates money to a worthy charity.”

A major finding was that 94% felt a company going “above and beyond in how it treats its employees” probably does the same in other aspects of its business.

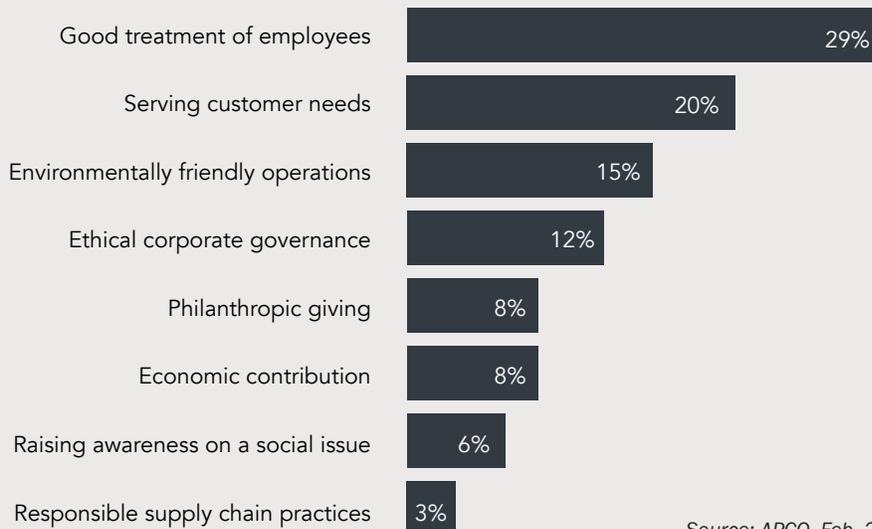
This finding relates to another major thrust of the survey: the best companies are those that are “societal shareholders.” These companies “factor society into their everyday business decisions: driving a positive impact on society will become core to what they do.”

And the best thing a company can do to be a good corporate citizen? Treat its employees well (see bar chart, bottom). ■

**% that say it is “Always OK” for CEOs to speak out on:**



**What is the most important thing a company can do when it comes to being “good to society?”**



Source: APCO, Feb. 2018

# Four Seasons Hotels Grew Consumer Engagement 54% Despite 25% Decline in Content Posted

Is it a trend? After several weeks of reporting 2017 data from several sectors we think it is. B2B and B2C brands are posting fewer pieces of social media content yet piling up more consumer engagement actions with those posts.

Again this week we've been supplied exclusive data from **Shareablee**.

In 2017 Hotel and Resort brands generated more than 57 million consumer actions (likes, comments and shares) with social media content across **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram**. All this despite a 21% drop in content posted in 2017.

The 57 million consumer actions meant the category grew its engagement at a rate of 6% year over year, or 3 million actions, says **Ron Lee** of Shareablee.

With far fewer posts and more consumer engagement, the category registered a strong 111% increase in actions per post. The category's success can be attributed to an increase in content quality over quantity as a strategy, Lee says. Its success also came from 31% growth in video content in 2017, leading to a 36% growth in video actions and 54% growth in video views.

## UBIQUITOUS FOUR SEASONS

As you can see from the chart, **Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts**, long a dominant social brand, is far in front again, with 6.3 million consumer actions in 2017, despite a 25% drop in content. The 6.3 million consumer actions represent a 54% growth vs 2016, Lee notes.

Similar to its text posts, Four Seasons posted 33% fewer pieces of video in 2017, yet consumer actions with its videos rose nearly 400%, Lee says.

Four Seasons' social strategy sounds simple when you talk about it, but it's far more complicated.

"Our goal in social is to offer Four Seasons followers a personal experience that fuels their desire to connect with the world and our people on a deeper level," an official tells us. The brand does this through innovative media formats, real-time guest response, excellent photography, which often is user generated, and rich storytelling.

The stories span the brand's global properties. This formula helps the hotelier to "instantly transport our audience into uniquely Four Seasons moments and extend our unparalleled service for which we are known," the Four Seasons official says.

Also notable is **Grand Hyatt** (No. 2), new to the top 15 list this year. Its nearly 3 million consumer actions represent a year-over-year increase of nearly 3,000%, despite a 43% decline in content posted in 2017, Lee says. ■

Shareablee		SOCIAL SCORECARD			
TOP HOTELS & RESORTS BRANDS – 2017					
Based on Total Actions (likes, comments and shares) Data provided exclusively to PR News by Shareablee.					
Sources:   					
Rank	Brand	Total Actions	Total Content	Actions per Content	Total Audience
1	 Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts	6,324,420	1,179	5,364	1,291,669
2	 Grand Hyatt	2,652,875	82	32,352	110,615
3	 Disney Aulani	1,758,505	322	5,461	942,133
4	 Aspen Snowmass	1,647,743	1,186	1,389	314,866
5	 The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company	1,511,322	3,645	415	1,163,277
6	 Atlantis Resort	1,480,355	1,261	1,174	1,033,941
7	 Caesars Palace	1,242,568	2,025	614	973,306
8	 RIU Hotels & Resorts	1,118,869	1,397	801	1,390,903
9	 Bellagio Las Vegas	1,095,424	845	1,296	1,423,552
10	 Hyatt Regency	988,785	103	9,600	123,778
11	 Beaches Resorts	968,539	1,409	687	692,890
12	 MGM Grand Las Vegas	779,733	791	986	1,801,558
13	 St. Regis Hotels & Resorts	709,991	540	1,315	512,409
14	 ARIA Resort & Casino	616,794	764	807	1,285,088
15	 Wynn Las Vegas	595,413	1,072	555	1,071,776



Rahul Roy-Chowdhury, VP, Google Chrome

**1. March for Our Lives:** As communicators know, adding apposite images and video can greatly increase the effectiveness of a message. “A picture is worth a thousand

words.” In the social era, images and video might be worth even more than that. This could be the case in the wake of the awful shootings last week at **Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School** in South Florida. The students’ goal is to ensure the moment is a turning point in the gun control debate. The students’ horrific live streams from the shooting might work similarly to the way newsreels of Vietnam helped change public sentiment on the war.

**2. Platform Prater:** It was a Valentine’s Day gift from **Snap Inc.** to those with large followings and influencers who are members of Snap’s Stories program. The social channel began Feb. 14 providing robust analytics, such as weekly Story views, time spent on Stories, daily unique story views and audience demographics. The move is intended to help brands and creators and comes on the heels of Snapchat’s poorly received redesign. – **Google** says it’s putting customer experience over revenue. From Feb. 15 the search engine giant’s enormously popular **Chrome** browser pledged to stop “showing all ads on sites that repeatedly display” disruptions such as videos with loud music and “giant pop-ups where you can’t seem to find the exit icon,” Google Chrome VP **Rahul Roy-Chowdhury** wrote in a Feb. 15 post. “It’s important to note that some sites affected by this change may also contain Google ads. To us, your experience...is a higher priority than the money that these annoying ads may generate—even for us.” The **Coalition for Better Ads** will guide Google in the process. Critics claim the Coalition is Google’s creation. – Indictments Feb. 16 against 13 Russians and three companies in **Robert Mueller’s** investigation into foreign meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election

indicate **Facebook** was their platform of choice. Facebook VP of ads **Rob Goldman** dispatched an 8-tweet thread claiming Russia’s main goal was to sow discord in the U.S., not influence the election. In a flurry of weekend tweeting, **President Trump** cited Goldman’s tweets as proof the election was clean. The grand jury indictments, though, say influencing the election was the goal. – In a related story, **Facebook** said Feb. 17 it will send postcards via snail mail to those seeking to buy political ads on its platform to check whether or not they live in the U.S. Once ad buyer received the postcard he/she would be instructed to return to Facebook and enter a code. Facebook refused to say how this method would prevent foreign agents from hiring U.S. residents to thwart the system.

**3. Punch Drunk:** So far **Carnival Cruise Line** communicators seem to be handling the incident on Carnival’s Legend well. The Legend Feb. 16 offloaded 26 members of a family due to their violent behavior onboard. “We sincerely regret that the



Jennifer Vandekreeke, VP, Carnival Cruise Lines

unruly conduct and actions of the passengers removed from the ship...may have prevented other guests from fully enjoying their cruise,” said **Jennifer Vandekreeke** VP, Australia Carnival Cruise Line, as passengers were offered a 25% discount on their next cruise. Passengers caught some of the action on video. Carnival said Feb. 19, “Our security team responded...to extremely unruly behavior...[although] the actions [by our security team], seen on the video...are not in line with our values and policies. We are conducting a full investigation and will take appropriate corrective action as necessary.”

**4. What Were They Thinking? Or Where Were Their PR Pros?** Arguably America’s greatest Winter Olympian

**Shaun White** and entertainer **Jamie Foxx** seemed poorly media trained last week. Foxx, 50, was on a live **ESPN** broadcast Feb. 16 before the **NBA All-Star** celebrity game when anchor **Michael Smith** asked if Foxx prepared for the game by playing hoops with alleged paramour **Katie Holmes**. Foxx removed his headphones and walked off the set. And did White, 31, really think he could avoid being asked about the out-of-court sexual harassment settlement he reached last year with **Lena Zawaideh**, 26, a former drummer in his rock band? One way to try is to allow only males to ask questions, although two female reporters wanted to ask some, too. **ABC’s Matt Gutman** threw a monkey wrench in the works by asking White during a Feb. 13 presser about sexual harassment and his legacy. White answered the question poorly: “Honestly, I’m here to talk about the Olympics, not gossip.” White apologized for his word choice, not his behavior toward Zawaideh, the next morning on **NBC’s The Today Show**, which knows a bit about sexual harassment courtesy of **Matt Lauer**.

**5. Growth: Geben Communications** launched an insights/analytics service that new business insights lead **Devin Hughes** will head. – **Sacred Heart University** of CT will introduce an M.A. in strategic communication and PR later this year. – **Robert Gordon University** and the **Chartered Institute of Public Relations** are launching a diploma in crisis communications, Scotland’s first.

**6. People: Starbucks’** VP, global communications **Linda Mills** is joining **Boeing Commercial Airplanes** as VP, communications. ■



Devin Hughes, Lead, Business Insights, Geben Communications

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