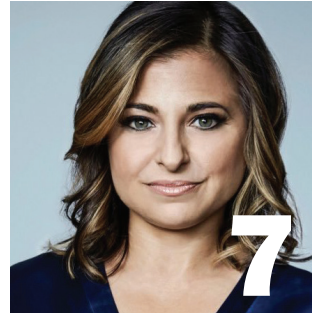


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MESSAGING

Communicators Need to Place Fallout from Capitol Violence into Larger Corporate Narrative

It's too early to know what historians will say about last month's [violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol](#). As lawmakers gathered Jan. 6 to certify the 2020 U.S. presidential election results, an angry, weapon-wielding mob breached security, stormed the historic building and came within feet of entering the Senate chamber. The rioters, 400 at least, were a portion of some 25,000 people who attended a rally to protest the legitimacy of the 2020 election.

Rioters occupied the site for several hours, making their way into the House chamber and members' offices. Members and staff, meanwhile, were hiding in the Capitol, [fearing for their lives](#). As we go to press, [140 police officers are reported injured](#); one was killed and two have committed suicide. 400+ arrests were made, with more expected.

A few hours later, the building was cleared. Lawmakers who were able went back to work; 147 voted to overturn some results of the election; [this after 62 challenges](#) to the contest's legitimacy were rebuffed in courts.

CORPORATE REACTION

One thing economic historians likely will include in their accounts is the reaction of some of the country's largest companies. It started with several blue-chip firms denouncing the violence and the 147 lawmakers who voted in favor of overturning election results.

Then the movement gained speed. Powerhouse firms from **Coca-Cola** to **Dow Chemical** and **Nike** reconsidered, paused or stopped, at least for the moment, donations from companies' political action committees (PACs). Some PACs halted

all political donations, others targeted certain lawmakers. One company shut its PAC altogether.

2021 SHOULD BE FUN

Related issues for communicators run the gamut from explaining why their company funded politicians who voted to hinder the peaceful transfer of power to whether the brand will resume funding, of whom and when.

In addition, the situation exposed yet another activity of corporations, their political donations. Stakeholders, including customers, employees and shareholders, likely will pay more attention to this somewhat opaque activity.

PR pros, according to communicators we spoke with, will need to fit political giving into a larger narrative. With the social, political and economic upheavals of 2020, stakeholders and critics are expected to increase scrutiny of corporate activities in 2021 (see page 7, chart p. 13). This includes political giving, diversity and sustainability (see pages 4 and 16).

PAC donations are just one way corporate money is funneled to politicians, political parties and other causes. Companies can donate unlimited amounts to super PACs, for example, and industry PACs. In addition, CEOs can personally donate to candidates.

On the other hand, though corporate PACs are limited to donating \$5,000 to a member of Congress (\$10,000 to a candidate), the money adds up fast. The **AT&T** PAC, for example, [donated in excess of \\$3 million during the 2018 election](#). **Google's** NetPAC [disbursed nearly \\$2 million](#) during 2019-2020.

Continued on page 2



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Continued from page 1

Moreover, the speed at which top-flight companies announced their PACs would halt or pause the flow of money was significant (see story on page 14). And the number and quality of companies doing so was impressive (see chart at right).

PREDICTABLE?

For some communicators, the reaction was not a large surprise. Suspending PAC giving, they argue, stems from what we noted earlier: 2020 pledges on diversity and other issues set the stage for a reset in 2021.

“Actions, as the saying goes, speak louder than words,” **Prudential Financial** CCO Alan Sexton tells us. That adage, he adds, will ring true even more in 2021. “What companies do, or don’t do...is what will be most scrutinized in this environment of distrust and misinformation.”

Businesses and organizations, he adds, “will be judged based on the progress they can show [on issues like diversity], and the accomplishments they can point to” (see story, p.5).

BROAD PICTURE

Licy Do Canto, managing director of **APCO Worldwide’s** Washington, DC, office and its mid-Atlantic region, agrees.

“What I think is happening is part of a much broader narrative...You’re seeing a reassessing of the role of corporate America...the next chapter,” Do Canto says. The smart companies, he says, will realize “this is not a temporary moment.”

Indeed, two days before the Jan. 6 violence, more than 160 NY-based business leaders sent a letter to president Trump, urging a peaceful transition. One of its signatories, Kathy Bloomgarden, **Ruder Finn’s** CEO, tells us Jan. 6 “was a turning point for many companies...spurred by both employees and customers, for business leaders to act as corporate citizens.”

Corporate America Reacts to Jan. 6, 2020

General Action Against Objectors: These companies halted donations to the 147 lawmakers who voted to overturn the 2020 election. Companies mentioned in our story are not included in this table.

COMPANY	NOTES
AirBNB	
Best Buy	Halted donations to the 147
Blue Cross Blue Shield	
Cisco Systems	Stopping future contributions to the 147
Edison International	Freeze of “indefinite duration” to the 147
Exelon	
General Electric	
Intel	
Kraft Heinz	
Marriott International	Among the first to stop donations to the 147
MassMutual	
MasterCard	
NASDAQ	Halted donations for the “next several months” and will stop giving “for the foreseeable future” to the 147
State Street	
Verizon	
Walmart	“Indefinitely suspending” donations to the 147
Walt Disney	No contributions in 2021 to the 147

Pausing: This group of companies said they’ll pause political donations to either all politicians or the 147. Some indicated the length of the pause.

COMPANY	NOTES
3M	
American Airlines Group	3-month break
Archer-Daniels-Midland	
Blackrock	
Boeing	
BP	6-month break
Cargill	
CitiGroup	Temporary pause on all donations
CME Group	
ConocoPhillips	6-month pause
Duke Energy	30-day pause
Ford Motor	Pausing new donations “for now”
Gilead Sciences	“Temporarily suspending” all donations
Hilton	“Indefinite” suspension
Kroger	Plans to resume PAC donations after its pause
Major League Baseball	First major sport to pause donations
McDonald’s	
Tyson Foods	Pausing all political donations
United Parcel Service	Suspended all contributions “for now”
Valero Energy	

Source: Bloomberg Quint and news reports

Of course, signing such a letter comes with responsibilities. Days before the Jan. 6 violence, **Microsoft** employees questioned company president Brad Smith, who also signed the letter. Employee Jake Friedman tweeted that Microsoft’s PAC supports politicians who contested election

results (see right).

Under the previous administration, Do Canto says, CEOs and companies got pulled into the political sphere “whether they wanted to or not, from the very top of government.”

That’s changed, so far, under the Biden administration. “What hasn’t changed,” he says, “is for corporate America to take a position decisively on something...It’s not just employees demanding that; it’s also shareholders.”

In addition, he says, companies are “paying more attention” to how their money talks and “what it’s communicating” about corporate values. Previously, companies’ communication “was all about promoting a particular product or service. Now that microscope is pointed” inward, Do Canto argues. Companies, he says, are asking ‘How does what we do on giving, diversity and the environment reflect back’ on us?

Make no mistake, for many companies, the PAC action is more than altruism. One consideration stems from the question: How will our company’s stance on social and political issues influence profits?

BLACKROCK HEAL THYSELF

Indeed, **BlackRock** CEO Larry Fink, a leader in the corporation-as-societal-partner camp, frames CSR within a financial context. In the 2021 version of his yearly letter to CEOs, he stressed the policy and financial importance of companies disclose more information about their reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions. Besides being good policy, Fink said the issue is important because of financial risks to investors.

Perhaps illustrating what is yet to come as stakeholders pressure companies to act their values, Fink, who runs the world’s largest asset management firm, received a slightly embarrassing letter Jan. 25. In it, 24 investment managers, who oversee more than \$1 trillion in funds, demanded more information about BlackRock’s political giving. Will the company offer more insight into its political donations? In addition, the letter asked whether or not BlackRock will halt donations to the 147 who voted to overturn the election. Fink was one of the first to condemn Jan. 6’s violence.

At press time, other companies were making news related to the 147 and former president. **Sephora**, the cosmetics giant, ended its relationship with 29-year-old influencer Amanda Ensing (1.4 million followers on **Instagram**) over offensive social posts, including several related to the Jan. 6 events.

In another item, grocer **Publix** was facing boycott threats on media reports that a daughter of the chain’s founder donated \$300,000 to the Jan. 6 “Stop the Steal” rally.

WHAT’S NEXT?

One question is where brands go from here. It seems clear some PR pros will need to craft messages that their company’s PAC is resuming donations. PACs might even restart donations to some of the 147 who voted to overturn the election. A look at how companies communicated their PAC actions leaves plenty of room for interpretation.

Some paused donations to both Republicans and Democrats to reduce political tension in a badly divided country.

← **Tweet**

 **Brad Smith** @BradSmi · Jan 4
At Microsoft we believe a healthy business community depends on our Constitution, the rule of law, and the peaceful transition of power. Our democratic principles must come first. We thank our elected officials & public servants who work tirelessly to protect our democracy.

59 300 1.7K

 **Jake Friedman** @spaceisfunn
Replying to @BradSmi and @tomwarren
[fec.gov/data/receipts/...](https://fec.gov/data/receipts/)

Hey Brad, maybe we can stop giving those who want to disrupt the "peaceful transition of power" Microsoft's money. Thanks.

More in 2021? It’s not only customers complaining about social issues. Here a Microsoft employee calls out president Brad Smith for promoting a peaceful transition yet funding lawmakers who voted to overturn the election.

“I can confirm that we have suspended PAC contributions to all candidates to allow for a comprehensive review of our approach,” Prudential Financial’s Sexton tells us. “I don’t have anything else to add at this point.”

Others, such as Nike and AT&T, had targets. They suspended donations to the 147 Republicans (8 senators and 139 House members).

Several hedged. For example, **Facebook**, **Google** and **Microsoft** said they’d pause political giving and review donation policies. Similarly, television giant **Comcast**, which owns NBC, and banking behemoths **Goldman Sachs** and **JPMorgan Chase** made similar statements.

Amazon suspended donations to the 147, but said it will speak to those it supported and evaluate their responses “as we consider future PAC contributions.”

Others did not specify what they’d do during the pause. Some were vague about how long pauses would last. Several used language so they could resume PAC donations.

GOOGLE: NO DONATIONS

Of the tech titans, Google was the first to move beyond pausing. The search giant’s **NetPAC** said Jan. 26 it “will not be making any contributions this cycle to any member of Congress who voted against certification of the election results.”

Similar to the tech companies, **Bank of America**, **FedEx** and **Wells Fargo** said they are reviewing the situation.

One company, the brokerage **Charles Schwab**, decided to get out of the political donation business altogether. In a Jan. 14 statement, it announced its PAC will close immediately. The statement said the PAC will send remaining funds to **Historically Black Colleges and Universities** and **the Boys & Girls Club of America**, which it supported previously.

Continued on page 12

Upholding Democracy: Brands Must Define Their Purpose as Government Allies in 2021



Many agencies and practitioners already have attempted to predict what corporate responsibility and purpose look like for brands in 2021, but the time for pontification is over.

Now, we must be unapologetic in our expectation for companies to step in when governments fall short. This tenant of corporate responsibility was brought to the forefront with **Twitter** and **Facebook** announcing they'd banned former president Trump—permanently and indefinitely, respectively—from their platforms. This unexpected move (albeit possibly overdue) may change the relationship brands have with consumers and the role they should play in protecting people, communities and the environment.

Our society is grappling with the urgent need to dismantle systemic racism, a former president who incited violence and refuses to concede his election loss, and a rising and preventable COVID-19 death toll.

In such times, brands can, and must, serve as champions and allies as the new administration fights to rebuild trust in government, fight the pandemic and advance critical climate protections.

As today's lead story reports, many large companies suspended donations to elected officials who opposed certifying the election results. This signals the urgency, but not the end, of corporate response to this domestic crisis.

Companies need to reevaluate brand purpose and ask tough questions about their role in society. For example, when collective bargaining is prohibited locally, how will brands advocate for workers? When overtime restrictions are lax, will companies insist on a standard for manufacturers—or rely on government? When misinformation spreads online, how will companies protect users?

DEFERRING TO REGULATION

For decades, companies deferred to regulation. Efforts to go beyond legal and regulatory compliance were voluntary.

One voluntary initiative, the **Fair Labor Association (FLA)**, was formed with support from the Clinton White House in response to labor and human rights abuses in global supply chains. [The organization chartered a code of conduct](#) that global apparel and footwear companies adopted to support a baseline of fair labor standards long missing from the industry. It certainly never existed as part of a global framework.

Over time, the FLA expanded its work into other industries, including agriculture and electronics. Eventually, it helped **Apple** transform how it supported its supply chain workers,

who were subjected to severe overtime, forced labor and other human rights abuses.

Ceres, another voluntary organization investors and environmentalists created following the **Exxon-Valdez** oil spill in 1989, crafted a set of principles to guide business conduct.

Through voluntary participation in the organization, investors and companies made significant individual progress in areas such as emissions reductions, while also advocating for strong state, federal and global climate policies including the Paris Climate Accord.

FEW COMPANIES ACT

Three decades later, though, real advances in protections for workers and the environment tend to be limited to the voluntary actions of a small group of companies. They go beyond legal and regulatory requirements based either on their values or the promises they've made to consumers, investors or other stakeholders.

Regardless of myriad motivations driving their decisions, Twitter's and Facebook's actions signal a new wave of brand purpose is on the horizon—one that goes much deeper than surface-level CSR commitments or ambitions.

While there has been much progress in improving corporate behavior and driving responsible business, we must evaluate whether our expectations of brands are high enough and then challenge them to fill the gap when a government fails to appropriately protect its citizens, communities and the environment.

Here are three key expectations for corporate behavior that will support the rebuilding of public trust and complement the new administration's efforts to drive rapid social and environmental progress:

1. Where Government Falls Short, Step In. Twitter's and Facebook's response to the former president's dangerous behavior may have been too little, too late. Brands must embrace informing the public and filling the gap on social and environmental protections.

2. Outline Strategies to Dismantle or Reduce Systemic Racism. Companies must outline, specifically, what they are doing to ensure BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) representation at all levels, create inclusive work environments and address racism on a day-to-day basis to protect

“Twitter's and Facebook's actions signal a new wave of brand purpose that goes much deeper than surface-level CSR commitments.”

employees and stakeholders and advance racial justice.

3. Support Washington's Effort to Lead on Climate. As the new administration gets to work, brands should pick up the mantle and reduce their environmental impact while ardently supporting strong state, federal and global interventions to curb climate change.

Several leading business groups have issued statements of support and calls to action in response to the tragic events on Capitol Hill Jan. 6. These include influential organizations such as the **Business Roundtable**, the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce** and the **National Alliance of Manufacturers**.

Beyond statements of support, we must look at corporations as necessary rather than tangential allies of government and consumers in tackling pressing societal issues.

The new year is time to lead and recommit to leveraging the power of a global brand to support and advance so-

cial and environmental progress on a scale not seen before. Prior corporate social responsibility commitments should be revisited in partnership with stakeholders to ensure alignment and demonstrate clear, measurable impacts both in the short- and long-term.

A **McKinsey** study shows consumers chose value, quality and brand purpose as the top reasons for trying a new brand—which is critically important as consumer behavior continues to change during the pandemic and takes hold long after.

More than ever, consumers are watching closely to see what companies will do next, looking for real evidence and bold actions to indicate whether the brands they support share their values and will be an ally in building a brighter future. ■

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DIVERSITY

BY NICOLE SCHUMAN, SENIOR EDITOR, PRNEWS

Public Goals and Regular Updates Provide Higher Accountability for Promises of Inclusivity

Societal unrest during the summer of 2020 led many businesses to take a hard look at what they represented to their audiences in terms of diversity and inclusion. Since then we've seen many organizations make statements and promises to practice greater inclusivity on everything from hiring to campaign content and representation. Whether or not these promises resulted in real change remains to be seen.

While systemic change takes time, eager audiences want to know where organizations stand in their progression toward inclusivity. In **Edelman's 2020 Trust Barometer Special Report: A Universal Demand for Change**, 63 percent of respondents said brands making a statement without taking action may be seen as "exploitative and opportunistic."

Communicators are the gatekeepers to delivering on the results of these initiatives.

Setting public goals "brings an additional level of accountability to a broader group of stakeholders, including employees, customers and partners," says Laura Birk, VP, Human Resources, **Barilla Americas**.

In addition, "Public goals also provide an opportunity to bring key learnings to the industry. We're not afraid for other companies to learn with us from our mistakes."

CHANGE STARTS FROM THE INSIDE

For many organizations, communicating progress on their initiatives starts with transparent internal communication. Employees often are the first to hear of such promises and see

the diversity strategy, creating a great impact on the morale and belief system of the company.

At **The Kroger Co.**, for example, leadership hosted 30 virtual listening sessions to hear from employees following the murder of George Floyd. The team also engaged in conversations with community leaders to understand areas of opportunity as an employer, grocery provider and community partner.

The insights from this listening tour informed the company's **Framework for Action: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion plan**, which features 10 short-term actions and long-term steps the company committed to take. In August, Kroger shared its plan internally. Following feedback, it shared the plan publicly says Kristal Howard, head of corporate communications and media relations.

According to Trisch Smith, global chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer at **Edelman**, there is no one-size-fits all approach in driving an effective DEI strategy. However, pledging a commitment is critical for its advancement.

"Companies should incorporate and apply a DEI lens to everything that they do and say," Smith says. "Ongoing internal communications efforts are valuable in making sure employees understand the DEI commitments, how the organization is living its commitments and the role of each person—senior leaders and employees throughout the enterprise—in helping to advance DEI goals."

Continued on page 6

ACKNOWLEDGING MISTAKES

Bloomstein provides an example of how **Old Navy** transparently worked through a DEI crisis to become more accountable to customers.

“In 2019, Old Navy announced a partnership with Open to All, the nationwide coalition of businesses pledging support for nondiscrimination policies,” she says.

The announcement came after a year of soul searching following an incident in Des Moines, where a Black customer said the company was racial profiling after he was accused of attempting to shoplift a coat—the coat he was wearing when he entered the store.

“At the corporate level, Old Navy reacted swiftly; the company apologized, fired employees who were involved in the incident and participated in a broader investigation to better understand if their store policies and operations upheld systemic racism. They provided frequent updates to the media on their efforts, as well as a commitment to public growth and change,” says Bloomstein.

Because of Old Navy’s quick distribution of information, they were able to communicate progress in an effective way for customers AND critics.

“By prototyping in public and allowing yourself to evolve amid scrutiny, your organization can serve as a model for others,” Bloomstein says.

For Birk, communicating these actions leads to a higher level of accountability with employees.

After listening and learning from employees following calls for racial justice last summer, the company established a Workplace Impact Racial Injustice charter, which includes “key actions and metrics around access and exposure to leadership, employee development, recruiting and employer branding, communications, community outreach, and supplier diversity,” Birk says.

Continual communication, she adds, is key to building trust during this process, even if results do not meet goals immediately. Barilla reports its progress every six weeks during all-employee town halls.

“A high level of transparency and authenticity is especially critical to earning the trust of employees,” she says. “Let’s use the example of diverse hiring. It might not feel good to share that your company has only a small percentage of minority employees, but it...shows employees that the company has not only recognized a problem but that it can, and should, be talked about openly.”

SHARING THE MESSAGE

Like any good campaign, how you share the message remains key as a fundamental strategy, particularly during times of change. Looking at who is delivering the message of progress is also important for consideration.

“The voices enlisted in sharing your steps are of the utmost importance to ensure you effectively reach your intend-

ed audiences,” says Smith. Edelman’s research shows that while CEOs play a critical role in communicating these efforts, “when it comes to the topic of racial justice, audience peers, subject-matter experts, activists and advocacy groups are the most trusted spokespeople.”

Smith provides strategic imperatives to consider when communicating where a company is on its DEI journey. These include:

- ▶ **Be Mindful and Acknowledge Differences:** Do not assume all audiences share the same access to information or experiences.
- ▶ **Be Authentic:** Be mindful not only of the language used to ensure cultural relevance and resonance, but also of the tone when translating.
- ▶ **Be of Service:** Brands should partner with the right organizations, community advocates and influencers with deep roots in the community that are addressing the current needs.

LAGGING BEHIND

Change doesn’t happen overnight. So what can an organization do when its audiences demand information on progress and action, but it hasn’t yet reached its goals? Many say continual communication remains key.

“Even if you haven’t met your goals, it’s important to provide frequent progress reports,” Birk says. “Substantive diversity and inclusion goals or commitments are often multi-year commitments. It can, and should, take time to achieve big goals...We need to show [employees] that we’re moving in the right direction and celebrate the progress we’re making.”

Margot Bloomstein, principle of **Appropriate, Inc.** and author of “Trustworthy: How the Smartest Brands Beat Cynicism and Bridge the Trust Gap,” says showcasing that vulnerability helps an audience understand where a brand is coming from.

“Seize the opportunity to be transparent and share what’s working well—or not working at all,” Bloomstein says. “Did you learn something new and need to course-correct? Did you realize a new hiring process was harder than you thought? Or maybe an investment revealed deeper internal problems you needed to address first? Remind customers and stakeholders of your values and share how you’re working to manifest them. Commitment to progress matters, and your work—and transparency—can be a model for other organizations.”

And sometimes brands that acknowledge a slow adaptation to change can discover greater systemic issues.

“If you spoke out to support change but haven’t put action to your words, it may be that a particular change would be inauthentic to the values in your organization,” Bloomstein says. “That’s...an opportunity to address a bigger issue. Maybe rather than updating packaging or a product name, you need to determine if it’s still appropriate to even continue manufacturing that product.” ■

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Chobani's First Corporate Affairs Chief Sees a Reckoning on CSR Issues in 2021

Editor's Note: CNN viewers likely know Cristina Alesci, a [business reporter on the network](#) and a writer on its news sites since 2014. In turn, Alesci knows CEOs, having interviewed dozens, from [Howard Schultz](#) to [Jamie Dimon](#). She also interviewed Hamdi Ulukaya, founder of **Chobani**. More important, her 2015 CNN story was [about the refugees Chobani employs](#). "He was not only hiring great people; he was saving them...helping people [break down the barriers to a better life in America](#)," Alesci says.



Cristina Alesci
Chief Corporate
Affairs Officer
Chobani

The story hit Alesci, the daughter of immigrant parents, hard. Late last year she left CNN and joined Chobani as its first chief corporate affairs officer, reporting to Chobani president and COO Peter McGuinness. She leads external and internal communication, government and community relations, social impact and philanthropy. In addition, she's part of the company's executive leadership team.

When we mention authenticity, she responds, "I was offered a lot of positions. This is the only one that spoke to my values...I don't know how much more authentic I can be." When we say, 'We make all-natural food that's accessible to everybody'—not just to hipsters in Brooklyn—we actually mean it. Chobani speaks to me. That's as authentic as it gets."

She and John Kell, the company's media lead, assure us Hamdi remains very active in the company's mission to provide nutritious food at reasonable prices and change the world. In fact, that the company is founder-led is one of Chobani's advantages, Kell says.

And the company's growing. In 2019, Chobani posted double-digit growth across its oat milk, creamers, functional wellness drinks and yogurt businesses in groceries and online, according to **Nielsen U.S. Food**.

In light of the Jan. 6 violence at the U.S. Capitol and the social, racial and economic unrest of 2020, we asked Alesci how CEOs are thinking about promises many companies made last year, as well as what a veteran journalist brings to a corporate setting.

PRNEWS: Companies issued a lot of strong messages during 2020. Will consumers in 2021 be checking to see if these messages lead to action?

Cristina Alesci: I covered business for a dozen years...the financial crisis and its aftermath. I saw people losing their homes. I saw office workers crying as they lost their jobs. And last year, for the first time as a journalist, I started believing some of the stuff I was reading in press releases, that companies were actually going to [make good on their promises].

And here's why. I spoke to a lot of CEOs, off the record.

[The reason they will make good on 2020's promises] is because they have to...Companies that don't live up to their promises will not survive. There's going to be a massive shakeout...People will hold those companies accountable if they're not living up to their promises. They will lose customers and won't be able to attract the best talent, and their businesses will crumble.

PRNEWS: So, 2020 was a watershed.

Alesci: As a journalist who interviewed CEOs for 12 years, I have to say there was a coming-to-Jesus moment last year. Everyone believed what they said...that we have to make a change...everyone believes those changes have to happen. The question now becomes execution...If you don't execute right, you're done.

I talked to CEO after CEO who said, 'It's not just the customers anymore. It's the employees who are holding us accountable. The employees want to see change. We can't hide anymore. We can't point to these fancy, consultant-produced pieces of research to justify what we're doing. We can't twist ourselves into a pretzel to justify what we're doing. We have to make a change, as difficult and expensive as that can be.'

PRNEWS: What do you tell Chobani about media?

Alesci: It's a little bit of what they already know, which is, 'Don't bullshit the press.' The media knows how to hold people accountable and we should never mess with that. What I think I bring to the table is an absolute insider's view that will never go away. I will always consider myself a storyteller and a journalist at heart...I will bring that perspective to work every single day.

PRNEWS: Compare your journalism job to your new post.

Alesci: I went into journalism to tell stories, to help society and give a voice to the voiceless. For me, I think what I'm doing at Chobani is an extension of that. You're still telling stories at a company that's giving a voice to the voiceless. We're doing so much to raise awareness of issues [like child hunger](#) and better treatment of hourly employees.

My job as a journalist was to make those kind of stories acceptable, entertaining, to a certain extent...meaningful and impactful. That's what I'm doing here. I'm here to show the world what we're doing [on issues and as a modern food company]. Not tell the world, but show the world. We don't go out and bang the drum much about what we're doing.

PRNEWS: Chobani wants to 'change the world.' How?

Continued on page 8

Alesci: I'm a big believer in the journalism adage, 'Show don't tell.' We already do so much to show that we're living our values. During the pandemic, [we raised wages for our hourly workforce](#). We were one of the few companies to [provide childcare for our hourly workforce](#)...We're sending a truck a day of food to food banks around the country...

We're showing the world that you can [grow and expand](#) and be a smart business and at the same time make a positive impact in the world.

PRNEWS: What about taking stands? How does Chobani

think about the risk involved?

Alesci: I'm going to speak from the heart. There's no risk in standing up for what's right. And we don't do that by issuing a statement. We do that by hiring refugees, by highlighting their stories, by pushing for a reasonable immigration reform that makes sense...We should recognize the pain and suffering in our communities...issuing a press release or a statement is easy. We don't do that. ■

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INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

MELISSA PROCTOR, ACCOUNT DIRECTOR, WE COMMUNICATIONS

FROM SURVIVE TO THRIVE: STAFF ENGAGEMENT TIPS FOR 2021



As the world continues to rock and reel through concurrent stressors, companies need to reset and reevaluate their employee experience. In the wake of change and uncertainty, employee engagement programs are [failing to meet employee needs](#).

It's easy to understand why. There's not an organization anywhere that's escaped the pandemic and few signs point to us going back to what we considered normal soon.

Now the question is: How do we move from survive to thrive while continuing to live and work in uncertainty?

[With fewer than 20 percent of leaders](#) prioritizing investment addressing emotional health, equity & inclusion and culture, part of the communicator's mission in 2021 is to find ways to inspire creativity, positivity and hope, and help employees find balance.

There are key questions organizations and communicators need to reflect on as they move forward:

- ▶ How can we cultivate collective strength?
- ▶ How can we stay committed to core values and beliefs?
- ▶ How can we maintain and strengthen culture while working remotely and apart?
- ▶ How can we encourage connection when distancing?
- ▶ How can we support employees' well-being?

Even before COVID-19, there was demand for a new way to lead, communicate and work—one grounded in continual dialogue with all stakeholders. This is even more critical today. Below are engagement strategies that will help internal communicators set a course for a successful 2021.

ASK HOW THEY'RE DOING

It's obvious, but overlooked: To know what people want, listen. And do so with intention to act. What are the organiza-

tion's listening mechanisms? Company surveys and requests for feedback can feel daunting. Don't let the process get in the way of the priority.

Shorter, more frequent and informal pulse surveys may be easier to collect employees' responses. Then, leverage any chance you have to encourage two-way dialogue.

Ensure Q&A is a part of every meeting, use internal collaboration tools to post short polls or invite feedback and encourage frequent one-to-one conversations.

Remember the most crucial step: when employees take the time to share input, follow-up is imperative. Let them know they've been heard, then provide a road map for action based on the input. This is key to creating trust.

HELP MANAGERS MANAGE

Leaders and manager play an integral role in the wellness of a team. Managing in a virtual environment, with myriad stressors, means additional workload and strain. Plus, some leaders might find themselves wading into emotional territory far outside their comfort zone.

Take off some of the pressure. Arm leaders and managers with coaching, resources and tools to direct and handle difficult, even sensitive, conversations. Remember [many managers are reporting high burnout rates](#) as they struggle to provide extra empathy, agility and resourcefulness to support teams. Help them.

Employees juggling family life can find the pandemic as challenging as single people fighting feelings of isolation. This is true for everyone in the org chart. So, avoid making assumptions. A good rule of thumb is to remember we're all in the same storm, but not the same boat.

FEELING VULNERABLE IS OK

Situations we've never faced are part of our daily lives. We must consider safety in new ways, from errands to play dates to family gatherings. Parents are pushed to the limit with full-time work and kids learning from home.

Living with the unknown is the norm now. Only when communicators listen and understand employee challenges can they create steps to manage those hurdles.

Every company is different. Same for employees. Leaders need a clear picture of what employees really are facing. This can help lead organizations to empower staff to learn to ask for help and reinforce that feeling vulnerable is OK.

The goal is to create safe spaces where staff can speak about their struggles and encourage colleagues to do the same. Again, this is not easy, yet it's critical. Create opportunities for employees to connect with colleagues. Safe havens where they can share and support each other.

SET BOUNDARIES & REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Communicators need to mindfully identify what we need to be our best selves. Use the new year as a time to prompt staff to take personal and professional inventories to determine what they need to operate with purpose. These can be reviewed one-on-one or as group exercises. Challenge employees to listen to and learn what each team member needs to perform their best work.

What new rituals can we build into our days to give ourselves the space to thrive? What is working to help keep you sane, focused and positive? What will keep you protected from the negative? Is this a good time to reevaluate social media uses and exposure to breaking news?

Organizationally, consider incorporating mindfulness and relaxation exercises into group meetings. One fail-safe approach is to do what works: Lean hard on calendars. Block and prioritize time to make sure staff is meeting the need for balance, whether it's a workout or walk, spending time with children doing schoolwork, making time for midday meditation, or checking out with a favorite book or podcast. Promote the idea that the organization believes these 'appointments' are as sacred as meetings and staff will be more likely to honor them.

NEW WAYS TO CONNECT

As we emerge from survival mode, companies need to think about how to illuminate positivity and celebrate great work people are doing during—and despite—a challenging time.

In our remote lives, we've lost a lot of the camaraderie of sharing with our office families. How can you recreate the bonding of the watercooler? Or unplanned hallway chats?

Consider scheduling timeouts. Arrange for 15-minute small-group meetings that pair different employees with one rule: No work talk.

Make fun and creativity priorities when it comes to fostering new ways of collaboration and processes. Invest in putting team bonding on agendas, whether it's virtual happy hours or group education workshops. Consider creating activities that help build gratitude muscles, where we take moments to celebrate what's working and to honor accomplishments and small victories.

How are we up-leveling opportunities to inspire each other, and sharing pandemic tips and tricks, including new hobbies, talents, interests and skills that bring joy? Learning from one another can inspire goodwill and positively impact teams.

LEARNING NEW WAYS REQUIRES GRACE

Individuals and brands must move to a place of empowerment, where we embrace the unknown and new ways of working. This space will manifest what we need as individuals to feel supported, do our best work and create more balance. It's not easy, and progress might not be as apparent as we'd like. But, it's possible we're at a tipping point.

It's time to **double down on empathy** and connection. To look backward at last spring, and marvel at how far your organization has come. To take stock in collective resilience and learning. And share that with work communities.

Making it through 2020 is reason for pride. Now, set your course for 2021, so that our future selves—and employees—can look back and say, 'I'm grateful for the changes and new approaches that were put in place.' ■

Contact: karak@we-worldwide.com



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Female and Male Mentors are Keys to Success for Many Top Women in PR

It's no secret that women dominate PR jobs. The well-known data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) says the field is 60 percent female.

Yet the Biden-Harris administration [made headlines](#) when it named an all-female communication team late last year.

MAKING PROGRESS

This past fall, **Clorox** named a female chief executive. With that, the Fortune 500 list broke its previous record; [with 38 female CEOs](#), it surpassed the prior year's record of 33.

Companies across the board are committing to gender diversity at a higher level. Last year, **Goldman Sachs** CEO David Solomon [committed to diversity initiatives](#) for clients of the investment bank. More recently, **Nasdaq** [filed a proposal](#) to require companies have at least two diverse directors, including one female.

McKinsey's latest ["Women in the Workplace 2020" report](#) shows that from January 2015 to January 2020, women in the C-suite increased 4 percent—not a tremendous jump, but a step in the right direction.

In 2019, California enacted a law requiring at least one woman on the board of public companies based in the state. (At the end of last year, the state added [a law](#) requiring publicly traded companies headquartered there to have at least one member on the board from an underrepresented community.)

A GRINDING HALT

Despite these examples of progress, the novel coronavirus upended many women's career trajectories.

[More than 2 million women](#) have left the workplace due to the pandemic, with more likely to follow. One-third of mothers have considered the move, according to McKinsey.

We talked to [PRNEWS Top Women in PR](#) honorees about the advancements of women in the workforce, the importance of mentorship and how the industry can help tackle the challenges of working women.

Roundtable participants included Maddi Bourgerie, director of communications and PR at **RVshare**; Randi Liodice, president & chief strategy officer at **Kaplow Communications**; Michelle Martinez Reyes, chief relations officer at **Kelley Kronenberg**; Liz McKenzie, head of PR and communications at **Canva**; Alonda Thomas, interim VP of communications/director of PR at **Howard University**; Megan Tuck, VP at **The Bliss Group** and Tracy Van Grack, SVP of communications & public policy at **Revolution LLC**. Responses were edited for length.

PRNEWS: Though women dominate PR jobs, senior positions have long been held by men. What are the biggest advancements that have helped to improve women's place in the industry and the workplace?

Randi Liodice: I've been fortunate enough to have a number of strong female mentors who gave me the guidance to seek out opportunities that would allow me to grow. Most recently, I've been fortunate to work with a founder who created the agency environment she longed to experience—one where women, and mothers in particular, didn't need to step out of their careers just as they were taking off. In doing so, she's set an example that I hope to both emulate and continue.



Randi Liodice
President & Chief Strategy Officer
Kaplow Communications



Alonda Thomas
Interim Vice President of Communications / Director of Public Relations
Howard University

Alonda Thomas: I have primarily worked for women during my career, and strong Black women at that. In the entertainment industry and higher education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, you can find women of color in top roles. I attribute that to male presidents who support diversity and make a conscious decision to fill leadership teams with women... Having diversity champions and advocates is critical to continue progression toward equity.

Megan Tuck: I have spent the past decade of my career in a women-owned integrated communications firm that has placed many women in positions of leadership. This has allowed me to see opportunities for me to grow to senior leadership.



Megan Tuck
Vice President
The Bliss Group

More women—particularly women of color—must be provided with opportunities to see themselves as critical to the creative work, with proof that they will be fairly promoted and compensated for their contributions.



Maddi Bourgerie
Director of Communications and PR
RVshare

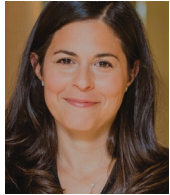
Maddi Bourgerie: I have tied myself to strong women at the places I work. At first, it was by chance. My first boss was an amazing example of how to hold your own in a room full of men. She always brought her ideas to the table and did it with confidence, grace and grit. I also found that having male advocates was key. Having a male leader who saw my work ethic ultimately advanced me in the workplace.

Michelle Martinez Reyes: The best catalyst to advancement [for me] has been prominent male champions and supportive female champions already at the top. It's ironic that it sometimes takes a man to champion you to get you in "the game," like a club of sorts that sponsors new members.



Michelle Martinez Reyes
Chief Relations
Officer
Kelley Kronenberg

PRNEWS: How can the role of women in PR be elevated?



Tracy Van Grack
SVP of
Communications
& Public Policy
Revolution LLC

Tracy Van Grack: While women comprise the majority of PR roles, they occupy a small fraction of senior leadership positions. There are a lot of efforts to rectify this disparity, including leadership development programs, women's affinity groups, equal pay commitments, and better child-care and flexibility for working parents.

But at the end of the day, an organization that lacks gender diversity at senior levels needs to take a good look at how it values diverse perspectives more broadly.

It's about creating an environment that recognizes that diversity of all kinds creates better organizations and better results.

Even before COVID-19, the communication function in organizations was becoming a critical part of the leadership team.

The growing number of communication risks, accelerated by the rise of social media, creates an imperative for organizations to support strong PR teams.

For communications professionals to succeed in the future, they must not view themselves as megaphones for organizations' decisions, but rather integral members of the decision-making team.

Tuck: The PR and communications industry still has a long way to go when it comes to enhancing the roles of women of color and placing them in positions to thrive over the long term.

Advocacy groups like **600 & Rising** and **Hold The Press** are aiming to hold the leaders in the industry—many of whom verbally committed to making change for better diversity and equity in the summer of 2020—accountable.

PRNEWS: We keep seeing reports about more women leaving the workforce because of the pandemic. There's talk about how society at large can help move the needle forward for women, but is there anything the PR industry can do to help tackle these challenges?

Liodice: There are high expectations for women – those that society places on us and those we place on ourselves. Yet, instead of celebrating our accomplishments, we are more likely to criticize ourselves for what we haven't achieved.

I've always felt that women are highly successful in public

relations because of the emotional intelligence that is honed not just from our professional lives, but from our personal ones.

We need to spotlight women who have taken different paths, who define success based on their own terms and hold them up as role models for the next generation.

Bourgerie: As an industry, we should work to elevate the voices of women who have found a balance. We all know women in our organizations that can speak to this topic, and it is important to share their struggles, successes and ideas. It is the first step to changing societal norms and keeping women in the workforce.

Martinez Reyes: The pandemic has placed even more unrealistic expectations on women in the workforce...We are expected to do it all in the same space, and simultaneously, which is not achievable, particularly without assistance.

I don't think the PR industry can directly affect that other than shedding light upon the issue to be able to continue to advance women's' issues all around.

PRNEWS: What advice would you give your younger self?

McKenzie: Far too often we're our own biggest critics and find reasons to convince ourselves that we're not good enough to take on new challenges and opportunities.

Self-awareness and personal standards can be great for helping us grow and reflect, but most of the time we're actually doing ourselves a disservice.

The world has enough barriers without us reinforcing them with our own self-doubt. Seize the opportunity; if you don't champion yourself, who will?



Liz McKenzie
Head of PR and
Communications
Canva

Tuck: Imposter syndrome is very real. In the beginning of my career, I tended to stay quiet in the workplace in an attempt to fly under the radar, out of the false fear that I did not belong.

In particular, as a Black woman trying to navigate a corporate world where few people looked like me, I had to overcome what *imposter syndrome* was telling me—that I did not deserve a seat at the table.

To my younger self, I'd say, "You deserve this opportunity, as much as any one of your peers. Now, show off."

Martinez Reyes: The path to success is not linear; take your time. People are always in a rush to meet all these personal goals, but experience is the greatest teacher.

Thomas: Don't worry about the entry level salaries; think long-term to the salary you could make after 10+ years in the industry.

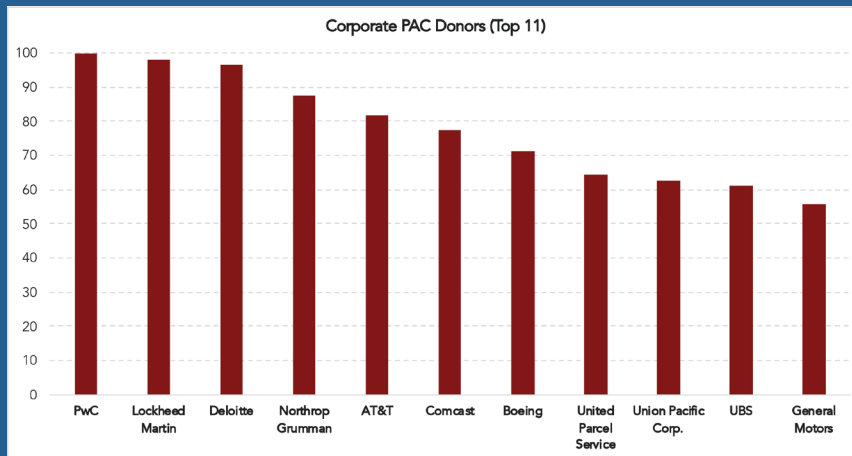
In your first years as a professional, focus on working at places where you can gain real experience. Work on making your brand and service indispensable. ■

Contact: eburadbury@accessintel.com

MEDIA COVERAGE OF BRANDS' PAC ACTIONS

How did the actions of companies to pause, re-evaluate or halt giving via political action committees (PACs) to 147 or all U.S. House and Senate politicians play in the media? Data from **Signal AI** provided to Mark Weiner, PRNEWS columnist, **Cognito** executive and author of "PR Technology, Data and Insights," sheds some light on this question.

Signal AI's analysis focused on media coverage specifying the name of well-known companies on the topic of removing PAC funding. Of the 11 companies generating the highest scores, each organization's total is on an article-level analysis. The scoring also includes sentiment toward the company, salience of the company in the news item and readership of the publication. 0 equals absolutely negative, 50 represents



Source: Signal AI

absolutely neutral and 100 is absolutely positive.

PwC, Lockheed and **Deloitte** lead the pack (pun not intended).

Some companies that chose to 'consider an appropriate response' or not to respond fell victim to criticism from journalists and social media.

Confirmation of the presidential election generated considerable interest outside of the US, as 60 of media coverage originated through domestic sources while 10.5 percent came from Europe. News from the US and Europe focused on companies that acted by withholding PAC funds to election-deniers: 99 percent of European coverage and 82.5 percent of US coverage commended companies that responded confidently, stated a position and then took decisive action on that position.

For Weiner, the data indicate "silence and equivocation speak loudly to Americans, who expect their employers, brands and investments to reflect their personal public values." In this case, intrepid companies that acted, were rewarded for it.

"In light of a divided political climate and an increase in attacks on those participating in the political process, we believe a clear and apolitical position is in the best interest of our clients, employees, stockholders and the communities in which we operate," the Schwab statement said.

Schwab made its move reluctantly.

"It is unfortunate that our efforts to advocate for investors are now being purposefully misrepresented by voices on both sides of the aisle as something they are not. It is a sad by-product of the current political climate that some now resort to using questionable tactics and misleading claims

to attack companies like ours," it said. This was a not-so-veiled reference to an ad from **The Lincoln Project**, which incorrectly said Schwab, not its PAC, donated to the 147.

American Express sent a memo to all employees Jan. 11 to announce it was stopping donations to 22 House legislators who voted to "disrupt the peaceful transition of power." None of the senators the company's PAC supported voted to overturn the election.

The AXP PAC, similar to many others, is supported through voluntary employee donations. In some cases, board members also are permitted to donate to corporate PACs. Companies are permitted to cover some PAC expenses.

IT'S THE PAC NOT THE COMPANY

Many companies use wording similar to the first line of the above-mentioned Schwab statement: "The Charles Schwab Corporation has not, and does not, contribute to lawmakers, political candidates or political parties. The Charles Schwab Corporation Political Action Committee (PAC), which is funded by voluntary contributions from employees and directors of Schwab, is the sole means by which any financial support has historically been offered to lawmakers."

Hallmark's HALLPAC blasted Sens. Josh Hawley (\$7,000) and Roger Marshall (\$5,000) for

voting against the election and [asked for its donations back](#).

Dow Chemical specified length in its statement. Dow said its halt in donations would last one term; for House members that's two years, and six years for senators.

In addition, it said it will not donate to the re-election of any of the 147. [Dow gave at least six figures](#) to the **Michigan Republican Party** yearly, including \$1 million in 2017.

General Motors decided not to suspend or pause PAC donations. It released a statement through a spokesperson that said GM PAC will continue to review donations, as it's done previously. "For 2021, as is standard in any contribu-

tion cycle, PAC contributions will be evaluated to ensure candidates align with our core values.”

A LIGHT LIFT?

Some critics contend pausing PAC donations now, well before the 2022 mid-term elections, is a light lift for companies. Though fund-raising is a non-stop effort in American politics, January during an off-year is not high season for donations. Some companies, these critics contend, will eventually restart their donation process, likely in the run-up to November 2022. The break between donations, these companies hope, will ease immediate pressure from stakeholders. They also note that large companies still employ lobbyists.

On the other hand, the PAC situation has some Republican politicians concerned. “I think you can safely say that Republican House incumbents who have relied on [donations from] business [political action committees] PACs are facing difficult situations,” a veteran GOP fundraiser told CNBC.

As a result, some Republican lawmakers are considering appealing directly to corporate CEOs for donations, CNBC reports. This maneuver bypasses company PACs. CEOs, as individuals, can give the maximum contributions to campaigns and affiliated committees, or an unlimited donation to House Republican super PACs, CNBC said.

This approach can work on the congressional level. About half of the CEOs of Fortune 100 companies donated personally to a candidate or party this cycle. It’s more of a problem with donations to presidential campaigns, however, as a donation paints a CEO and his/her company as a supporter of one candidate or another. At least on the presidential level, this is a reputation issue that few Fortune 100 CEOs desire to hurdle. Perhaps that’s why only six CEOs of Fortune 100 companies donated to either Biden or Trump.

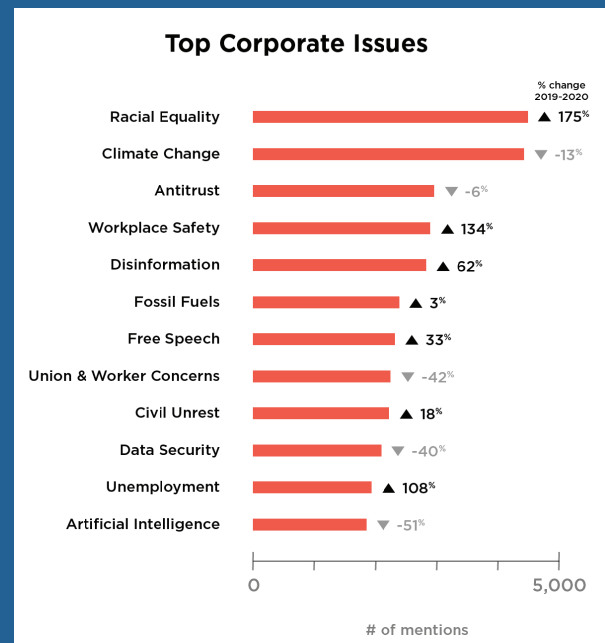
Again, the question: What’s next? If you look at a transcript of Microsoft’s Smith explaining why PACs are vital, it seems clear at least some companies will donate again.

Communicators at companies resuming donations should be as authentic and transparent as possible about doing so, APCO’s Do Conto says.

On the other hand, Bloomgarden says, this moment has “accelerated the potential for a complete overhaul of donation policies.”

In two years, Do Conto believes, it will be more than, ““Oh,

MAJOR ISSUES FOR REPUTATION



Source: High Lantern Group

Communicators will face melding corporate political giving with brand reputation in 2021. Certainly, the events of 2020 tee up other issues that communicators must address. Which ones? Data offers potential answers. Released late last month, High Lantern Group’s 3rd annual *Brand Pressure Index* analyzed 6 million 2020 tweets from 3,500 activists, influencers and political figures about 350 social issues and their intersection with 1,000 brands. Ranking is by number of mentions.

Mixed news as Black History Month begins: Racial Equality was the top issue, up a huge 175% vs the same period in 2019, yet Diversity & Inclusion is number 20 on the chart (not shown), down 18% since 2019.

there’s an election coming up.” Instead, brands will assess and reassess “what the value [of political donations] is to our brand...and to who we are as a company as part of a broader discussion.” ■

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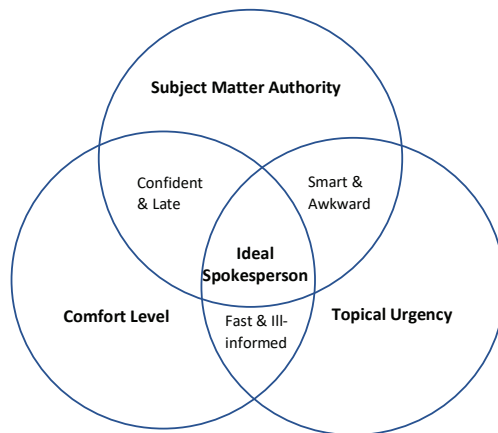
Using Research to Prepare for Quick Reaction to Emotional Situations



For some in financial services the late-January phenomena of **GameStop** represented an existential threat. For others, it was a chance to take a position. Unforeseen events like these are accelerating: Black Lives Matter and the Capitol insurrection commanded explosive and widespread notoriety. In response, courageous executives acted. This was not possible without prior planning and consideration.

In response to the Capitol riot Jan. 6, such major companies as **PricewaterhouseCoopers, AT&T, Lockheed Martin, Amazon** and **Comcast** announced they were pausing, reconsidering or halting funding from their political action committees (PACs) to certain lawmakers [see lead story].

Some organizations hesitated before acting; others did nothing. Certain companies remained idle because they feared getting it wrong owing to the situation's velocity and their unpreparedness. Nimble organizations are ready to mobilize when, and if, the moment arises.



Source: *The Author*

RESEARCH CAN HELP

Serious strategic planning for communicators focuses on target audiences, key media to reach those audiences, delivery of intended messages and timing. Every year, PR departments and agencies refresh plans to align on a reasonable and methodical course to achieve stated objectives.

Inevitably, something upsets even the best strategies. It may be a breaking news event on which your organization qualifies (or feels compelled) to comment.

In these situations, executives often respond emotionally rather than rationally. The dash begins: *Who can say what to whom, how quickly and to what effect?*

Data-informed communication planning helps mitigate chaos. An [annual landscape analysis](#), along with regular updates, top-line pulse checks and instant alerts, enable organizations to respond more thoroughly, purposefully and efficiently.

The process reflects a need to align on an organizational communication framework. A landscape analysis provides PR pros with a structure that includes target media, meaningful topics and a platform to track breaking, unanticipated messaging events.

We should always track over-arching organizational reputation attributes like: ESG, leadership, quality of products and services, workplace environment and financial performance. A landscape analysis assesses your business environment, organizational priorities from top leaders, and preferences

and concerns of external and internal stakeholders. The analysis may combine all or part of the following communication research instruments: surveys, social listening, journalistic media analysis and audits of smaller groups, such as key executives, journalists and opinion leaders.

Apply research findings to identify messages that are: most compelling to stakeholders and credible coming from your organization.

MOST SITUATIONS

This might not capture every unanticipated event, but it should inform your intended message when time is short. Highlight media that are most trustworthy and engaging to stakeholders. Look to reinforce strengths revealed through research; important, but more complicated, address competitive shortfalls.

Deciding 'what to say' and 'to whom' leads to 'who'... Seek leaders, not just communicators, who offer confidence, expertise and responsiveness.

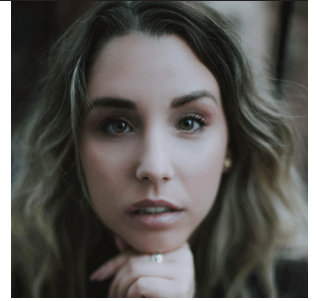
Research reveals the most important messages and media ('what we say' and 'to whom'). Align high-priority topics to the most qualified spokesperson and create a version of the Venn Diagram [see above] for each. You can raise levels of media comfort or heighten awareness to the need for responsiveness through training, as the overlap may be scarce.

Beyond the baseline landscape analysis, continue to monitor news and social using a real-time platform and deeper analysis, when required. Agile pulse check reporting reveals emerging issues by rerunning the landscape analysis in miniature. More frequent top-line analysis enables communicators to quickly assess competitors: Are they rushing in? How does the media react to their position? Is this an opportunity to positively differentiate your company, or is it a shiny waste of time? Of course, in certain cases, companies and leaders act fearlessly when their ethics can't withstand compromise. Closely monitor the event to determine if, how and when to refine course as necessary.

If you're only reacting, you're too late. To gain an advantage, work in advance to decide which topics merit a response. With advanced planning and thorough communication research, you reduce the time to reach a purposeful decision by knowing who should say what, to whom, when and to what effect. ■

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How Black PR Pioneers Made it Possible to Celebrate Black History



Carter G. Woodson said, “Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history.”

Black history has been celebrated in the U.S. for the last 95 years. The idea was conceived more than 100 years ago. Still, the stories of Black PR pioneers remain largely unknown.

Diversifying history—especially PR history—is essential. What lessons can the [diverse leaders in our industry's history](#) teach us about ethical and accurate representation today and in the future?

THE FATHER OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In 1915, Woodson created the **Association for the Study of African American Life and History** (ASALH). This organization laid the foundation for what we now observe each February as Black History Month.

The massive under-representation of African Americans in books and literature on American history was Woodson's inspiration. The organization worked to promote studying Black history as a discipline and honoring African Americans' many accolades.

What we know as Black History Month initially was a week-long celebration. Woodson's “Negro History Week,” in 1926, launched with a mission to bring attention to school systems that needed help creating curriculums on Black history. It was observed the week of February 7th—perfectly coordinated to also commemorate Abraham Lincoln's birthday on the 12th and Frederick Douglass's birthday on the 14th.

The campaign was extremely successful, leading to demand for teaching materials and sparking the birth of many Black history clubs and associations.

In 1976, for the 200th anniversary of the United States, President Gerald Ford announced that February would be recognized nationally as Black History Month.

BE YOUR ADVOCATE

Woodson certainly received inspiration from powerful figures like Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, who rightfully are considered PR pioneers when one takes a closer look at their personal histories.

Douglass, originally Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, was born into slavery. Later, he escaped and changed his name to avoid being caught. He was an activist for equality and human rights and was heavily involved in the abolitionist movement. In addition, he was a newspaper editor, writer and lecturer.

He authored three powerful autobiographies, released between 1845 and 1855, putting him at risk of recapture. He attacked slavery and racism through speeches and editorials. He even had portraits of himself painted to illustrate the image of a successful freed slave.

During the Civil War, he encouraged Blacks to join the Union Army because it brought them closer to eliminating slavery. He also advised Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson on issues affecting African Americans. After the war, he fought Jim Crow segregation.

Like Douglass, Ida B. Wells was born into slavery. She was soon freed under the Emancipation Proclamation. She mastered many roles, including journalist, educator and activist—pooling skills that one needs to work in PR.

After experiencing racism on a train ride, Wells began writing about race and politics. When she became a teacher in Memphis, she began to cover issues in segregated schools and was later fired for her ideas in 1891.

In 1892, a white mob lynched three African American men who set up a grocery store in Memphis. Wells traveled the South for two months to gather more incident reports, including them in a campaign she launched soon after. A

After newspapers rejected her writings, she founded publications and went on to publish large lynching reports. She eventually brought these writings to President William McKinley, in 1898, calling for reform.

Separately, in 1896, Wells formed the **National Association of Colored Women**. Later she founded the **Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago**, in 1913. The club played a huge role in victory for women's suffrage in Illinois that year.

KEEP SHARING BLACK STORIES

If any sector can share content en route to a more diverse history, it could, and should, be the PR industry. Diverse stories need to be brought forward.

PR pros must acknowledge the diverse history of their field and let others know how social movements were really PR campaigns—especially amplifying how Black PR pioneers were advocates for themselves and their community.

Since introducing the annual “Celebrating Black PR History” event in 2015, the Museum of PR has identified and share stories of numerous Black PR pioneers. Histories of pioneers like Moss Kendrix, Joseph Baker, Ofield Dukes, [Inez Kaiser](#), Patricia Tobin and many others [can be found at the Museum's site](#). ■

[Note: Learn more and Celebrate #BlackPRHistory during the 6th Annual Celebrating Black PR History event, beginning Tuesday, February 9. For more information and to register visit: <https://www.prmuseum.org/020921-celebrating-black-pr-history>].

Contact: jenny@prmuseum.org

Brands That Posted Once about DEI Received High Engagement, But Will They Act?

In the wake of calls for social justice last summer, it seemed as though every brand issued a statement or a black square.

Indeed, there were plenty of brand posts about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Yet note how many brands posted just once or twice.

There were nearly 7 million consumer actions on brands' DEI posts, according to **Shareablee** data, provided exclusively to PRNEWS. Actions are the sum of shares, comments and likes.

Actions on these posts rose significantly, more than 500 percent, vs the previous time period (Oct. 2019-May 2020 compared with June 2020-Jan. 2021). The largest increase was on **Instagram** (700+ percent), says Madison Busick, a marketing analyst at Shareablee.

The data exclude publishers posting articles about others' opinions and statements on DEI.

Posts came from a wide range of industries, including companies with a history of taking stands on DEI issues, and those without it.

While **Harvard Business Review** posted the most pieces of DEI content (18, on **Twitter**), they received little engagement. On the flip side, **Fortnite's** sole post, on **Instagram**, received the most.

Content that enjoyed high engagement came from brands that posted once or twice. They've since been largely silent. This begs the question of whether or not those brands are acting on DEI beyond posting. ■

TOP US BRANDS & ORGANIZATIONS POSTING ABOUT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Based on Total Actions (reactions, comments, and shares) 06/1/2020-1/25/2021

Sources: 

RANK	MEDIA COMPANY	ACTIONS 👍	CONTENT 📄	ACTIONS PER CONTENT 👍	AUDIENCE 👤
1	U.S. Army	45,972	8	5,747	4,849,290
2	U.S. Department of Defense	15,162	11	1,378	1,851,500
3	Panera Bread	11,787	1	11,787	3,041,720
4	Black Enterprise	10,943	14	782	661,719
5	K12 Inc.	10,506	13	808	434,631
6	United States Air Force	9,774	6	1,629	2,878,769
7	Cedars-Sinai Hospital	9,309	3	3,103	72,083
8	CHANEL	8,922	1	8,922	22,747,305
9	Tiffany & Co.	8,314	1	8,314	10,263,895
10	Lean In	7,746	2	3,873	2,312,326

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Sources: 

RANK	MEDIA COMPANY	ACTIONS 👍	CONTENT 📄	ACTIONS PER CONTENT 👍	AUDIENCE 👤
1	Fortnite	1,186,694	1	1,186,694	25,956,990
2	Instagram	619,000	1	619,000	384,787,507
3	Pantone	175,982	3	58,661	2,969,021
4	Champion	121,612	2	60,806	5,670,382
5	HomeGoods	114,949	2	57,475	3,370,013
6	NFL	114,160	1	114,160	19,720,728
7	TikTok	45,751	1	45,751	26,860,698
8	LUSH Cosmetics	42,126	3	14,042	4,226,792
9	Chipotle Mexican Grill	37,428	1	37,428	1,096,332
10	Tiffany & Co.	35,433	1	35,433	11,842,964

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Sources: 

RANK	MEDIA COMPANY	ACTIONS 👍	CONTENT 📄	ACTIONS PER CONTENT 👍	AUDIENCE 👤
1	Tampa Bay Rays	8,999	1	8,999	608,50
2	Chipotle Mexican Grill	8,711	1	8,711	1,043,44
3	U.S. Department of Defense	4,967	11	452	6,298,14
4	NASCAR	4,464	2	2,232	3,429,53
5	U.S. Army	3,927	7	561	1,692,77
6	The University of Texas at Austin	3,482	1	3,482	228,59
7	UNESCO	3,482	1	3,482	228,59
8	Texas A&M Football	2,349	1	2,349	250,69
9	NFL	2,192	3	731	26,074,71
10	Harvard Business Review	2,160	18	120	5,662,43

Source: **Shareablee**