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INTEGRATION

How Starbucks Creates Content and Integrates Social Media and Traditional PR—and Why

Right or wrong, the media is in the crosshairs. The White House targets the press regularly. Distrust in the media is rising, according to the **Edelman Trust Barometer** and journalists themselves feel they're "struggling to maintain" the public trust, a new report from **Cision** says. With media in a precarious state, **Starbucks'** SVP, global communications & international public affairs Corey duBrowa believes it's important for brands to have an alternative to media and create content themselves.

He discussed this during the **Arthur W. Page Society's** *New CCO* podcast (*PRNP*, Mar. 6). We asked duBrowa about that, storytelling, integration and what challenges are ahead.

During the podcast, duBrowa spends the majority of his time explaining *Upstanders*—content the brand has created in several formats that tells stories of socially active citizens in the Starbucks community. We asked what else Starbucks is doing to create content and how it's organizing its communi-

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IMAGE PATROL

BY KATIE PAINE, CEO, PAINE PUBLISHING

Navy, Marines Take 2 Paths on Crisis

There were too many examples last month of organizations screwing up. We could have piled on **PwC** for the Oscars, but given that Hollywood obsessed about it for weeks, it was hard to find much more to say. And of course, we would have loved to weigh in on the great leggings-on-**United** kerfuffle clinging to **Twitter** as, well, leggings do. But frankly, in these times, all that seemed trivial compared to a couple of serious crises plaguing America's military.

U.S. MARINES CORPS VS. U.S. NAVY

No, we're not talking about a football game (in fact, **Marines** can play on **Navy's** team, but that's not the point). We're talking about two crises with enormous ramifications that have engulfed the armed forces in the last month.

First there was news that a private social media group known as *Marines United* had shared sexually explicit photos of female Marines. Then came news that a notorious bribery and kickback scandal, known as "Fat Leonard," led to indictments of eight Navy officers, including an admiral.

Both stories had all the ingredients of a garden-variety, salacious scandal: sex, women and lewd behavior. How could the press possibly resist? Of course, it didn't.

The intensity of the coverage of the *Marines United* debacle quickly led to congressional hearings and an investiga-



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To Tell the Truth: Cable Getting More Transparent to Meet Consumer Demand



The Trend: I think demand for transparency is trending. It's probably been driven in part by the political climate of the last several months. But I think the demand for transparency was occurring before that time, just a bit more slowly. Kim Scott, a CEO coach and former faculty member at **Apple University**, has written a book that espouses transparency in management, although she calls it radical candor, which also is the name of her book. I love that term. In my world, consumers are demanding that we as an industry are direct and open. And it's not just in communications. The alignment between communications and marketing is critical to achieving collective marketplace impact on behalf of our members, which is our job at **CTAM** (Cable & Telecommunications Association for Marketing). There has to be transparency in messaging across both functions to be believed and accepted by consumers. The risks and pitfalls associated with not being transparent now are larger than they were in the past. We have to be able to tell the truth and back it up.

The Reaction: We are seeing need for transparency at CTAM in our work on an Industry Positioning Initiative with cable company and television network members. It's a long-term repositioning, brand and reputation-improvement effort. The aim is to develop a careful, thoughtful and concerted effort to change the perception of cable. We understand cable's reputation will not change overnight, so we took the approach that, at first, it's not going to be about what we say, but about what we do.

Our first step was to conduct a full year of research with consumers. We needed to go deep to learn if there was anything we could do to move the needle on reputation. If so, what would it be? We asked consumers about their perception of how the industry and their providers value them as customers, the strength of their experiences with cable and where they think we are headed in terms of innovation. We inquired about many of the things we *want* consumers to believe about cable, because we're innovating and improving their experiences today—and will tomorrow—but they don't know it.

Out of that we created what we call "experience opportunities." These are areas where consumers have told us that, if we deliver, they would change their minds about their cable companies. Then it's the job of the CTAM member collective to bring these experience improvements to fruition, then market and communicate about them clearly and consistently. If the industry collaborates to do this well, the research shows we can move the needle on perceptions 20 to 30 points.

What it boils down to is finding ways to give consumers what they tell us they want—which our members have discovered isn't as difficult a problem as they might have anticipated. These all are manageable; they are all things they're either doing or are on their way to doing. But it has forced us to be honest about it. To go back inside the companies and say, for example, that what consumers really want are simple, intuitive experiences. Then ask, how can we deliver on that? How can we make that real? And then it's easy to be transparent in your marketing and communications—and build a trust cycle.

Cable customers are seeing changes already, depending on the provider, but there will be more to come during the next two to three years. We have a roadmap and know where we want to end up, which is with a deeper emotional connection with the customer.

Right now our member companies are looking at their product roadmaps and customer care plans and assessing how they can make improvements and changes. Communicators are diving in and deciding how to talk about these experiences as a way to change our reputation.

To bring it back to transparency, we realized when we began this effort one year ago that we had to attack it differently than we would have five years ago. We know we have to make the experience promises real and true, because they will be scrutinized by customers at a much different level today than they might have been in the past. Every advance we communicate we must prove. We have to deliver and we have to tell the truth. Radical candor. ■

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How Starbucks Jumps the Integration Hurdle

tions team to work on such projects: “Another great example of us taking some risks and creating original content that can be distributed across a number of platforms is the *First and Main* series, which was conceived in partnership with a couple of amazing writers who used to contribute to *The Simpsons*. It’s completely different in look, tone and feel from *Upstanders*, but equally effective in terms of leveraging our Starbucks app and mobile customer engagement at scale. [http://bit.ly/2oix7Dk]

“In terms of our org chart, I will simply say we are definitely investing in what I would call a content engine team that is becoming a bigger and more critical part of how we go to market, so to speak, within our global communications ecosystem.”

TOP ISSUES FOR BRAND COMMUNICATORS

What about hurdles? The two biggest issues facing brand communicators was our next question. “We talked about this a bit on the podcast. Fake news is a very real phenomenon. I thought Scott Pelley’s *60 Minutes* segment [Mar. 26, http://bit.ly/2oq3ugw] was something of a flare gun, warning the industry that it is not just a catchphrase on **Twitter**, but a real phenomenon. What’s the old phrase? ‘A lie can travel around the world in the time it takes the truth to tie its shoes.’ That’s never been truer than it is today. So telling your truth, your way, is increasingly critical to our brand stewardship role.”

“My second thought we also touched upon in the podcast—I wouldn’t call it an issue but rather an opportunity. We’re at



Corey duBrowa, CCO, STARBUCKS

a time in which trust is essentially in crisis. Edelman’s Trust Barometer this year essentially shows all four of its key pillars – media, government, NGOs, business – going in the wrong direction trust-wise....The one bright spot in the survey was that employee voices are emerging around the world as the most trusted within any given company.

“We have actively been building a digital employee-engagement system for years at Starbucks, including very active use of social media. My metaphor for this is having a family meeting at a picnic table in a park—a private dialogue conducted in a public space. I’m here to tell you that Workplace by **Facebook**, in particular, has changed the way we engage

with our partners and the way we work around the company, as more direct engagement and feedback become possible with Workplace deployment. It’s become an absolute catalytic game-changer for us.”

You, the *PR News Pro* reader, often tell us you’re struggling to integrate social PR and traditional, face-to-face PR. It’s less of an issue at Starbucks. “I think we see the evolving world of digital versus traditional as part of one, big continuum called influence, where up-and-coming outlets such as *BuzzFeed* hold as much sway, if not more, with key audiences than traditional media, such as the *New York Times* or a wire service. The thing we all need to keep in mind is that we are in the business of storytelling – with protagonists, conflict, universal truths and everything that has made stories so core to our humanity since back when they were only shared verbally or painted on walls. We might tell a story differently with *Eater* or *Hello, Giggles* than we would with the *Wall Street Journal*, but the precepts are the same: mission, purpose, values, truth, transparency.”

LEAVING THE PRESS RELEASE

We went back to storytelling and dug deeper on a comment duBrowa made during the podcast. How do you get communicators to exit press release PR? “Probably by asking, ‘What business problems are you trying to solve with communication?’ If turning the volume knob way up to the point of deafness is your only answer to that question, then I guess a press release is the one tool you might think of to deploy.”

“If you start parsing your outcomes to include other elements like tone, or what kind of action your communication was able to generate with your audiences(s), then you start thinking of other solutions—our entire Newsroom is full of people-stories that tell you more about *who* Starbucks is and *why* than *what* we’re selling. That has made a big difference for us and helped keep our brand relevant, even as we have opened in more markets...each year I’ve been a partner, going on eight, now.” [news.starbucks.com/]

Stories about who and why over stories about the products being sold. That’s a refreshing change. ■

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Different Crisis Styles, Results for Marines, Navy

tion of armed forces' social media policies. The indictment of Navy officers provided enough juicy tidbits to keep media fires burning for weeks. What is intriguing is the starkly contrasting ways the services handled the scandals.

MARINES

First, in the interest of full disclosure, when the Marines United scandal was unfolding I was at the International Public Relations Research Conference, hanging with Marines who are part of the famed **San Diego State University** master's program for military public affairs officers (PAO). Any CCO in the *Fortune 50* would kill to have the PAOs this rigorous program turns out on his or her staff.

So, of course, I had to ask them what they thought. As far as I know they had not rehearsed their answers, but their messages were consistent and clear: They were furious. It was personally offensive and totally out of line with the service's ethics. It was also worth noting that the men were even

angrier and more appalled than the women. A former Marine turned investigative reporter who runs a website known as *The War Horse* broke the story. *Reveal*, a multi-media outfit specializing in investigative reporting, gave it legs.

The official media response from Marine leadership sounded remarkably like that of the students I met at the conference. Maybe the students received talking points, but I doubt it. These Marines weren't spouting talking points, they were articulating corporate culture.

Those initial talking points were followed up by an amazing display of transparency in which the full internal Marine memo on the crisis, complete with all the talking points, policies and detail you could ever want, showed up on *The War Horse*, the same outlet that broke the initial story. Although the scandal brought out the dark underbelly of sexism in the services, military men and women bolstered it further by weighing in to say that this incident should not be surprising. It was still textbook-perfect crisis management.

U.S. Marine Corps

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	D	All major U.S. papers covered the story. Subsequent hearings and statements from Capitol Hill helped sustain the story. Like many other crises, it was replaced quickly when others occurred.	If you're dealing with a crisis that involves sex, the internet, porn and women's rights, you're doing well if the story isn't being broadcast on Mars.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	A	Marine spokespeople were consistent, not surprising given the detailed crisis response plan that was leaked to War Horse.	OK, in an entirely hierarchical organization one might expect that all spokespeople are on the same page. But consistency flows from corporate culture, which always is the key to success.
Communication of key messages	A	When all ranks, genders and levels of authority are communicating the same message, you've managed your crisis perfectly.	Every organization should be using the Marine template for crisis response. It leaves very little to the imagination and judging from the consistency of messaging, it worked.
Management of negative messages	D	Sadly, the Marines United group and all that it represents did reveal a dark, negative message about sexism in the Marine Corps that is the antithesis of what the service is trying to project. And the fact that the leader of Marines United defended his actions did not help.	If there's a serious problem or a negative issue that you wish would go away but a crisis reveals is still prevalent, the best thing to do is acknowledge it. After that tell everyone what you're doing to combat it and make sure you measure and report on progress toward fixing the issue. Expect someone to be more evil than you could imagine.
Impact on recruitment	F	This type of scandal is the military's biggest nightmare. Like everyone else, the military is trying to attract the best, brightest and strongest of both genders. This scandal will leave potential female recruits wondering whether the Marines is for them.	When competition for talent is fierce, one of the lenses through which you want to make decisions in a crisis is how a crisis or potential crisis will influence your ability to attract and keep talent.
Impact on stakeholders	D	For the military, key stakeholders are lawmakers who control budgets, as well as ordinary citizens. A sex scandal is not going to endear the service to anyone, particularly if it gets played out during congressional hearings. Should the problem appear to be addressed, attention may shift elsewhere.	No one wants to be associated with a sordid sex scandal, so the more distance you can place between you and the scandal, and the sooner you can make that happen, the better.
Overall score	B-	The communications team gets an A+. The crisis plan was perfect and was executed as well as can be expected given the nature of the scandal. Unfortunately, as with most crises, what's needed is internal change, which won't happen overnight.	When communicators judge the success or failure of crisis management, it's important to separate problems that can be fixed by better communications vs. those that emanate from the core of your organization. The latter require structural change.

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NAVY

To be fair to the Navy, the Fat Leonard scandal is not recent news. The original investigation into Leonard Francis, *aka* Fat Leonard, began years ago, when news broke about the supersized (in all senses of the word) contractor who used sex, booze and other perks to divert contracts to his company and then bilk U.S. taxpayers for millions. Last month's indictments simply were the result of an ongoing investigation.

The lesson for PR people, however, was in the resulting coverage of the scandals. Most of the Marines United coverage included Marine spokespeople and leadership expressing horror, dismay and anger at the revelations. As expected, outrage from members of Congress and pledges to get to the root of the problem followed.

On the other hand, coverage of the Navy scandal focused mostly on juicy details about the size and extent of the par-

ties and Fat Leonard's largesse. There was no mention of pledges to address the underlying issue, or any attempt to rectify the Navy's damaged image with taxpayers. In fact, Navy leadership was totally absent from the coverage. Its response was, "We can't comment about an ongoing investigation." Fine. We've seen the TV show. NCIS doesn't want you to talk about active investigations, which is why you should brief influencers, retired officers or whatever credible sources you can find about key messages and details of what you are doing to make sure such shenanigans won't occur again.

Ultimately, it came down to a stark contrast between transparency and authenticity and standard crisis legalese. The Marines were overt, sharing policies and all the details the service could muster. The Navy said nothing. ■

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U.S. Navy

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	F	Given the international nature of Fat Leonard's activities, media coverage was global.	When your crisis touches multiple continents, you'd best have a global team of communicators who can address issues in every country where you do business.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	F	No doubt due to the advice of lawyers, there were virtually no Navy spokespeople mentioned in any of the coverage	If you, your surrogates or spokespeople don't get out the message, the only thing people will see are messages you wish would go away.
Communication of key messages	F	Not sure what the message was, other than it was a scandal, it went high up in the organization, and the investigations are ongoing.	The measure of success for any crisis is the degree to which you get across your messages or your side of the story. If you say nothing, you can't possibly succeed.
Management of negative messages	F	Sadly, the negative messages were all that came across in the coverage. The waste, the corruption, the salacious details filled the stories with nary a positive message in sight.	Negative messages are all that you'll see if you let the lawyers totally gag you (see above).
Impact on recruiting	F	No doubt some potential recruits might think the parties sounded like fun, but they probably aren't the kind of talent the Navy wants to attract.	Lots of publicity and attention may get the attention of job seekers, but they may not be the type of talent you're seeking.
Impact on stakeholders	F	Members of Congress hate learning about waste, fraud and abuse. Constituents hate it even more because it's their money that is being wasted. It will be a long time before they forget and forgive.	Your messages should be shaped with stakeholders and recruitment in mind. But if you lack messages and the only thing you can say is no comment, your opposition and the media will shape the narrative
Overall score	F	A corrupt businessman caused this crisis, but the culture exacerbated it and enabled it. A complete lack of a crisis communications strategy inflamed it.	It's common to lose your first battle with legal about communicating in a crisis, but odds are good that crisis management won't go well as a result. Use data and metrics (agreed upon up front) to show how much damage NOT talking can do and earn your seat at the table next time.

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4 Pages From a Phoenix Suburb's Crisis Plan



Has your organization been hit with a crisis? As a PR pro, you understand it's not a matter of if, but when. As a result, preparedness, including having a crisis communications plan, is essential to ensure a timely response.

When a massive five-alarm fire broke out on a Saturday evening in busy Gilbert, Arizona, a Phoenix suburb home to nearly 250,000 residents, the Gilbert Fire and Rescue Department partnered with Gilbert's Digital Communications Department to take a teamwork and technology approach to communication and community outreach.

This mini case study is an example of how an incident can continue to grow with time and how your response should, too. What started as a small fire at an apartment complex under construction quickly turned into a conflagration that threatened nearby homes, a 120-unit apartment complex, several businesses and Gilbert's municipal buildings. The situation resulted in evacuations, road closures, panic and tremendous curiosity as flames could be seen for miles across the Phoenix valley. Nearly 140 firefighters from multiple city agencies battled the blaze for more than five hours to stop it from spreading and potentially gutting an entire city block.

During this time our team was challenged with managing the news media, social media and community outreach. As mentioned above, preparedness is key in situations like this and with our crisis communications plan in place we were effectively able to become our own news agency to communicate the most up-to-date information to residents and the media. In fact, we had nearly 30,000 people following as Gilbert and the fire were trending with Beyoncé on **Twitter**.

Here are four key parts of Gilbert's crisis communications plan that we believe your brand can consider, too.

1. Be a News Agency. It's not a secret that the news media continues to shrink and news agencies are running with minimal staff. With this in mind, it's very important to be your own news agency and tell your story. You are the source and your residents will come directly to you for the most up-to-date and factual information. In addition, can anyone tell your story better than you?

The fire occurred at about 6 p.m. on a Saturday, not prime time for the media. This gave us the opportunity to be the source of information for residents and those looking for anything about the fire. We got ahead of the news stations and told our story live on social media before they went on air for the regular 10 p.m. news broadcast.

It's vital to build your following before a crisis hits so that when you need to distribute important information, your followers already are engaged. Plus, by consistently telling your story, the good and the bad, you build trust and credibility. And the best part is that technology is making it easier to tell your story, which brings us to our next point...

2. Embrace It. Technology is rapidly changing and is giving PR and marketing pros new outlets to reach and engage followers and customers. Embracing new tools and incorporating them into your communications plan, and more importantly, your crisis communications plan, is critical.

Find out where your customers are and use that platform(s), whether **Twitter**, **Facebook Live**, **Instagram**, **Snapchat** or a future social media platform, to share information before, during and after crisis situations.

It seems obvious, but make sure customers know where to find you and the information they seek. Gilbert has more than 25 social media channels, but during emergencies **Twitter** is our primary social platform to convey up-to-date information.

In addition to **Twitter**, we also used live video (see sidebar), and in this case, **Persicope**, to give the community an opportunity to see the scene and hear from and engage in a two-way conversation with Gilbert Fire's public information officer. We went live from the fire twice; the first time was before mass media coverage began and the second live segment competed with 10 p.m. newscasts.

During the fire, our social media updates included information on evacuations, road closures, media staging areas and status updates. **Twitter** also gave us an opportunity to show a behind-the-scenes look. We were able to tell the full story, from the firefighters battling the blaze to the rehab they needed when they returned from the front lines. **Twitter** also gave us the opportunity to thank local businesses that provided food for first responders and evacuees as well as neighboring cities that offered additional resources.

This storytelling power allowed us to continually engage our audience and provide a human perspective to the narrative. It also gave citizens an opportunity to connect with first responders and thank them for their effort.

3. No Solos. During a major incident, such as a five-alarm fire, there are a lot of moving parts. Here's a checklist from the fire that you can modify to your needs:

- ▶ Manage onsite media
- ▶ Handle phone and email media inquiries
- ▶ Gather the latest information
- ▶ Share the above information
- ▶ Monitor the media and social conversation

As you can guess, this is far from an exhaustive list. The point is crisis management is a team sport. You can't do it alone. It's important to build your crisis communications

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SWAT team *before* you need it. Waiting for a crisis to occur before deciding who will do what can be a recipe for disaster.

During the fire we had four staffers assisting with crisis communications and outreach. Three were onsite: One handled media interviews, another assisted with phone-interview requests and the third was working on social media while also gathering the latest details. The fourth was offsite monitoring news coverage and assisting with social listening. We found social listening was important because it clued us into how our message was being received and what parts of it either the media or we were failing to convey.

Had the fire worsened, our crisis communications plan outlines additional resources to be deployed. By planning

ahead and having your team in place, it makes coordinating communications during a crisis as seamless as possible.

4. Provide Information, Not Perfection. In a crisis, timing is everything. It is important to get ahead of the incident and establish yourself as the source of information. Crisis situations are evolving constantly and changing, sometimes by the minute. Your audience does not expect perfection, but it does expect and need information.

As soon as we are aware of a crisis situation, we make it a priority to post about it immediately on social media, specifically Twitter. If we lack many details, at minimum we recognize that there is an incident and let our followers know more information will be posted as soon as it is available. The fact that we at least recognize that there is an incident has helped to build credibility with our citizens.

We believe Gilbert's crisis communications plan can serve as a model for government communicators. There were more than 16,000 tweets posted about Gilbert and the Gilbert Fire, which, as we noted above, led to the topic trending with Beyoncé and the UFC on Twitter. People near and far were talking about the fire and we were leading that global conversation. Gilbert's tweets had more than 30,000 impressions and Gilbert Fire and Rescue's Twitter account gained an additional 700 followers. Citizens used social media as a channel to thank first responders and it was an incredible way to bring the community together during a tragedy. All of this was made possible by embracing technology and teamwork during a crisis situation. ■

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THREE LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT LIVE VIDEO

Live video can be an amazing resource, especially during a crisis. It not only allows you to show a scene but also provides an organization with the opportunity to put a face at the apex of a situation.

There are several options for going live, including **Facebook Live**, **Periscope** and **YouTube**. Even **Instagram** now has a live video feature. Before you go live, here are some things you should know:

1. **It's the ultimate multi-tasking challenge.** This

is something you won't necessarily understand until you try it. This is why practicing using live streaming prior to going live at an event, especially during a crisis, is imperative. When you're live, not only should you be emphasizing talking points, providing information or conducting an interview, but you also need to make sure you, or someone, is monitoring questions and comments. Engaging in a two-way conversation with viewers is the best way to connect with them. Bonus tip: Turn off all other notifications while you go live to pre-

vent them from interrupting your live feed.

2. **"Haters gonna hate."**

Just as with any other social media platform, live video gives viewers the freedom to say what they wish. Depending on your organization's policies, you can block them, or if you can't block them, encourage appropriate comments throughout your broadcast. More often than not, other viewers will end up policing the naysayers.

3. **Technology is draining.**

The great thing about technology is that you're

now able to do nearly everything from your smartphone. When you're managing crisis communications from your phone, your device is going to be working overtime, so it's important to make sure you not only have a full battery when you start, but that you also have a charger. This is especially important when you go live. Live broadcasts tend to drain smartphone batteries even faster and you will not know how long your emergency situation will last. The worst thing you can do is run out of battery power in the middle of a live stream.



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Bobby Muenster, Managing Partner, Spoke612

1. News Bits: Reeling from scandals of several varieties (*PRNP*, Feb. 27, Mar. 27), **Uber** could use some calm. Sorry, not happening. A legal altercation between it and **Google** is getting heated. **Anthony Levandowski**, who heads Uber's self-driving effort and is accused of stealing trade secrets from Google, invoked his Fifth Amendment rights, the legal equivalent of "no comment," refusing to release documents pertaining to the case. The former head of Google's driverless unit, Levandowski is concerned about being charged with a crime, the *NY Times* reports Mar. 31. PR pros know how warmly media and the public accept pleas of no comment. Courts feel the same way about the Fifth Amendment. There's a potential rift between Uber and Levandowski. Apparently Uber wants him to turn over relevant documents as part of the discovery process. Is Uber about to have another high-profile executive departure on its hands? – Speaking of **Uber**, driverless vehicles and unwanted publicity, the ride-hailing company suspended tests of such cars in three cities Mar. 25 after one of them crashed in Tempe, AZ. No injuries were reported. Uber's driverless car testing program has had a mixed record—in addition to successes there have been crashes and a procedural mishap: The company began testing its cars in San Francisco without registering for permits. Oops. – This is not an April Fools joke. Superstar hedge fund manager **William Ackman** apologized (*PRNP*, Oct. 17, 2016). Honest. The maverick billionaire penned a Mar. 28 letter to **Pershing Square Capital Management** investors admitting his doubling down on Canadian pharma brand **Valeant** (*PRN*, Apr. 18, 2016) was a "huge mistake...I deeply

and profoundly apologize." Ackman's support—he joined Valeant's board last year—had been a ray of hope for the brand, whose troubles included misstating financial figures in a press release and raising drug prices precipitously. Shares in the former Wall St darling fell to \$12 earlier this month after having reached \$250 in May 2015. Ackman dumped his Valeant holdings Mar. 13, resulting in a \$4 billion loss. – The **Reputation Institute's** annual *Rep-Trak 100*, which measures consumers' emotional bonds with 800 companies, found the top five U.S. brands are **Rollex**, **Amazon.com**, **Sony**, **LEGO Group** and **Hallmark**. The findings are based on a survey of 42,000+ consumers.

2. Deals: **Cision** acquired **Bulletin Intelligence**, a provider of customized briefings to CEOs and C-suites. Terms were not released. – Former **HGTV** and **DIY Network** host **Matt Muenster** is a co-founder of **Spoke612**, a video production firm, based in Minneapolis.

3. Platform Prater: **Twitter** Mar. 30 made good on a 2016 promise not to count the characters in usernames when a user replies to someone or a group. It's another way Twitter is easing the 140-character limit for tweets. Last September 19, Twitter stopped counting photos, videos and GIFs. – **Snapchat** and **NBC** again will collaborate on **Olympics** content. NBC and **BuzzFeed** will produce content for Snapchat Discover during the 2018 winter games from S. Korea. NBC is an investor in BuzzFeed and Snap; the trio teamed during the Rio Olympics, too. – **Facebook** is imitating **Snapchat**. Again. This time it's Facebook Stories, which like the original, Snapchat Stories, and

Facebook-owned imitators **Instagram Stories** and **Messenger Day**, will feature photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. While the feature is not yet offered on Facebook's business pages, it's expected to be soon.

4. People: Congrats to our good friend and veteran cable communicator **Bobby Amirshahi**, who was named SVP corporate communications at **Univision Communications**, parent of *Univision*, the Spanish-language TV network. Based in NY, he'll report to Univision EVP/CCO **Rosemary Mercedes**. Amirshahi has held senior posts at **Time Warner Cable**, **MTV** and **Cox**. – **Burson-Marsteller** said **Geoffrey Mogilner**, **Neil Barman** and **Kona Barrasso** joined its corporate and financial practice as managing director, senior director and senior director, respectively. Mogilner most recently was at **Baxalta**. Barman joins from **Deloitte Consulting** and Barrasso from **A.T. Kearney**. – Congrats to indie **French/West/Vaughan**, which celebrated 20 years in business last week. – **FleishmanHillard** named SVP and senior partner **Kristin Kryway Hollins** to lead its corporate reputation practice group in the Americas.

5. Sad News: The father of modern financial PR, **Gershon Kekst**, passed Mar. 17, aged 82. Known for being a person of few words and a calming influence, the **Kekst & Co.** founder sold his firm to **Publicis** in 2008. – **Pam Edstrom**, the E in **WE Communications**, passed Mar. 28 after a battle with cancer, aged 71. Her partnership with **Melissa Waggener Zorkin**, the W in WE, spanned some three decades. Besides co-founding WE, Edstrom is known for being **Microsoft's** first PR director. ■