THE PR FACTOR 2011
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COUNCIL of PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS
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PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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

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

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

As you will see in this section, brands are finding dynamic, integrated and creative partners today’s increasingly complex world. As corporate social responsibility becomes a key component of today’s marketing mix, companies are reaching out to public relations professionals to help expand their efforts to embrace a strategy that goes beyond merely handing out money.

With public relations firms expanding their offerings to help clients tackle an increasingly complicated marketing landscape, they find themselves adding new, nontraditional kinds of talent. From content creation and brand management to legal counsel and C-level expertise, the face of public relations is changing to meet these growing demands.

As social media takes a leading role in reaching consumers, public relations firms are working with clients to take advantage of constantly changing platforms. Here, industry leaders offer predictions about what will be the top trends and issues affecting the marketing community in the coming year.

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

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

The Council of Public Relations Firms
The Council’s resources include the searchable database Find-a-Firm and RFPBuilder, both designed to assist client organizations.

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

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C4 THE BIG IDEA

The goal of marketing communications has always been to come up with that one idea that encompasses a brand’s personality while connecting it with consumers in a way that boosts business and that relationship. As the media landscape changes, public relations firms are increasingly becoming the best possible partners in clients’ quests to reach that goal.

C8 THE TOP 10 TRENDS FOR 2012

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C10 NEW TALENT

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

Today’s Big Ideas employ a mix of paid media, earned media (traditional press coverage), owned media (company-owned websites, blogs, etc.) and shared media (social media, including blogs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). Big Ideas move fast. They engage consumers with relevant content, such as Unilever’s Degree for Men’s Adrenalist website. Like HP’s ePrint Live and Philips’ "Wake Up the Town" efforts, they find out-of-the-box ways to use new tools for those old marketing standbys, product sampling, experiential marketing and test marketing. They give consumers the opportunity to own the brand, as Wrangler did with its Next Blue initiative.

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

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

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

This summer, Carmichael Lynch Spong helped client Hormel Foods Corp.'s Jennie-O turkey brand create some magic and a Big Idea. Hormel wanted to find a way to get consumers to appreciate how easy—and tasty—it was to substitute Jennie-O ground turkey in recipes that called for ground beef. For five days, Jennie-O took over the Bistro Truck, a popular Manhattan food truck, wrapping it with “Make the Switch” banners. Instead of using ground beef, the truck’s burgers were made from ground turkey—and each day, courtesy of Jennie-O, the truck gave away 500 free gourmet turkey burgers at lunch. The truck’s location and menu were previewed to local foodies and bloggers, and posted daily on Facebook, Twitter and a special microsite.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Golin/Harris reorganized this year to reflect what it believed clients came to it for. "Our marketing world is changing, media is changing and none of the agencies working in it were changing, which seemed odd," says CEO Fred Cook.

"We used to just compete with PR firms. Now we compete with everyone in marketing: ad agencies, digital agencies, media buying firms. The landscape for us is different than it used to be. To be as successful 10 years from now, we need to think about how we approached our work and change at a very fundamental level."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Philips**

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

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

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

Philips gave 200 Longyearbyen residents the Wake-up Light to use for three months to see if it helped them wake up and helped them get through their dark days happier and healthier. “It was risky. It was a live social experiment, and we had no idea what the results were going to be,” Mr. Raucher says. As the test progressed, the residents shared their stories on Facebook and in blog posts; they were interviewed by the media and filmed for mini-documentaries posted on a Philips microsite. When the three months were up, 86 percent of the residents said the light made it easier to get out of bed.

“Wake Up the Town” represented work from Philips’ integrated communications team of agencies and “merged the best of our thinking,” Mr. Raucher says. The effort was recreated in 2006, splitting into gender-based Degree for Women and Degree for Men. But, says Senior Brand Building Manager Aaron Galloway, “We were doing OK, but not great. Consumers didn’t know who we were and what we stood for. ...We needed to go where our consumers were, shifted dramatically—from 90 percent of spending on traditional TV and print media five years ago, to a quarter of spending in the digital space today. “We merged the best of all the thinking into ‘Wake Up the Town.’”

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

**Unilever/Degree**

*Degree for Men* was looking for a way to amp up its connection with consumers. The Unilever line of deodorants/antiperspirants was recreated in 2006, splitting into gender-based Degree for Women and Degree for Men. But, says Senior Brand Building Manager Aaron Galloway, “We were doing OK, but not great. Consumers didn’t know who we were and what we stood for. ...We needed to go where our consumers were, shifted dramatically—from 90 percent of spending on traditional TV and print media five years ago, to a quarter of spending in the digital space today. “We merged the best of all the thinking into ‘Wake Up the Town.’”

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Brands today face high expectations. We meet them.

We drive credibility through traditional, hybrid, social and owned media. While consumers are rapidly finding, consuming, and sharing information, so are we. We deliver compelling, original content in every medium to motivate action online and offline.

We strengthen your engagement with the public to solidify the public’s engagement with your brand.

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

1. Engagement will be the key goal for 2012. The focus in 2012 will be on engagement—not merely “likes,” or fans or followers. “We need to get away from ‘likes’ and fans,” says Bret Werner, managing partner of Catalyst.

2. Your brand will need to be “on” 24/7. Jennifer Houston, president of Waggener Edstrom’s Studio D, tells clients that social media is like “a river that is always on, always flowing—whether or not your boat is in the water. You can’t jump in and out of the river.” Too often marketers and agencies have created Facebook pages, Flickr accounts or Twitter handles without an ongoing commitment to maintaining those media with fresh, relevant content. “There is a ton of ‘zombie media’ out there,” she says, which gets in the way of real engagement.

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

4. Social media will rely increasingly on professionally produced content (not that consumers care). The content passed along via Facebook, Twitter and You- Tube will largely be coming from the professionals. “For a while, it seemed that social media content was coming from everyone,” says Weber Shandwick CEO Harris Diamond. “Now what we see is that the content that is being passed along is generally professional content. Two years ago, we would have said something different. But today, it’s more likely that consumers are forwarding the newspaper columnist’s piece or the professionally done video.”

5. It will be more difficult to tell what is paid media vs. earned. Bret Werner

6. Brands will search for opportunities to market in the moment. Clients will look to PR firms to identify real-time marketing and engagement opportunities. Think of it as marketing in the moment and owning the conversation of the day. Jeff Beringer, executive director-digital and connector community leader for Golin/Harris, says, “A lot of brands have not figured out the opportunities to create content and reach consumers in real time.” Recently Golin/Harris worked with longtime client McDonald’s Corp.

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

8. Clients and agencies will continue to search for good, common metrics for social media efforts. "Measurement is going to continue to be on clients’ minds," says Mr. Beringer of Golin/Harris. "We continue to search for common measurement criteria. What are the criteria we are going to use to evaluate social media? Right now, every campaign, every agency has a different way of measuring.

9. Companies will work to globally integrate their digital presences. As social media tools have zoomed in popularity, many companies now find that they have websites, Facebook pages, Twitter handles and blogs that look and sound different from market to market, country to country.

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

“"The biggest factor that impacts agencies today is the internalization of social media strategy," says Burson-Marsteller’s Mr. Bassik. "That shift challenges agencies to provide even more useful services to clients."
At Cohn & Wolfe, we aim for ideas that are out of this world, but still grounded in results. Because, when you dig deeper and imagine more, anything's possible. And if a monkey can make it to the moon, why can't a bulldog?
In an increasingly globalized economy, public relations firms recognize that to drive their clients’ overall marketing strategy—and have a bigger impact on the bottom line—they need to raise the bar on content creation, brand management and digital analytics, and are hiring to meet the demands of this changing landscape.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Brand, digital strategies

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

In 2010, NASCAR asked Taylor to move beyond its traditional public relations services by conducting a strategic assessment of the motorsports landscape. The review resulted in the creation of an integrated marketing communications department within NASCAR.

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

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

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

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

“More than half of the world learns by visuals, and our growing creative capabilities have helped us to offer clients different ways in which to tell their stories that are more creative and more impactful,” says Jim Weiss, chairman-CEO of WCG, whose clients include Hershey Co. as well as several healthcare companies and pharmaceutical brands.

“The social and digital analytics pioneered by Common Sense helps us maximize the opportunity for the client and allow us to measure more effectively in ways that we weren’t able to do before.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

### C-level expertise

As digital media gets closer to the heart of marketing communications, PR firms will need people who can properly frame the issue for the C-suite and put the ever-growing text teams, our mobile team [and] our firm partners,” says Christi Davis Gallagher, director of brand reputation at Sam’s Club. “It’s critical that we’re all coordinated to drive the greatest impact.”

### David Witt

**Director, global digital marketing and brand PR, The Hershey Co.**

2012 Word of Mouth Marketing Association Board Chair

![David Witt](image)

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

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

Because content is such an important element in consumer engagement, brands have to think like producers and publishers: What content can get and hold the consumer’s attention over time? Particularly with respect to social media directed at consumers, brands have to think: “What can I give?” not just “What can I get?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“One of the questions I get most frequently from the C-level is, ‘Something happened and folks are talking about it online, and is this something I need to care about?’” he says.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Words key to managing a reputation are authenticit and transparency, says Ann Longsworth, global sustainability practice leader, Cohn & Wolfe, and that’s what PR is all about.”

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

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

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

CSR in Action at P&G

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

“We’ve been working with Fleshman- Hilliard for more than five years, starting with the philanthropic area. ConAgra Foods and the ConAgra Foods Foundation have been silent partners in the child hunger space since 1993; however, we wanted to bridge the foundation’s philanthropic work, which we see as an investment in the community, and the work the ConAgra Foods brands do to get consumers involved in child hunger. That’s where the [PR] agency comes in—to connect the dots.”

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

“We’re also working with the P&G Harvest Box, a kid-friendly, healthful food box that has been sent to more than 10 million children through the summer months. In the last two years, nearly 2 million boxes have been distributed. In addition, we’ve brought together Corporate social responsibility is rapidly becoming a key component of today’s marketing plans; but for many years, companies weren’t getting much credit for all the good they were doing. That’s changing as marketers realize the value of CSR and engage public relations professionals to help them expand efforts to embrace a strategy that goes far beyond just handing out money.

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a U.S. company, one issue it addressed was hunger in the U.S. To leverage its expertise in logistics, it worked with food banks and meal services to help route food and organize inventory in the most efficient way.

When UPS went public and expanded globally, adding a broader group of stakeholders, the company turned to APCO to help expand its CSR effort. Today, the company offers humanitarian relief and disaster preparedness as one focus and teen driving safety as another, both capitalizing on UPS’s core competencies of distribution and safe driving.

“It’s important to not only understand what you do well but that your corporate responsibility strategy grows, adapts and changes as your business grows, adapts and changes,” Ms. Greco says. “It’s all part of reputation management. As your stakeholders shift and change, and their expectations shift and change, you need to be able to change with them.”

**CSR in Action at Syngenta**

Addressing the fact that more than 49 million Americans suffer from hunger, global agribusiness Syngenta introduced wording Out Hunger, a program designed to engage its customers—growers—in supporting food banks throughout the U.S. The program was timed to coincide with the introduction of Syngenta’s Hallex GT, an herbicide used in growing corn.

Syngenta showcased the program at nine trade shows and industry events, including a final event at Syngenta’s U.S. headquarters in Wilmington, Del. More than $100,000 and five tons of nonperishable food items were collectively distributed to 80 food banks in 24 states.

“Our people at Gibbs & Soell worked hand in hand with the client to assemble and put together the donations. It was hard work, but our people found it a joyful experience,” Mr. Lambert says. “It goes back to the company’s bottom line—one of its global missions is to feed 9 billion people by 2050. You can see how you can have corporate global objectives and build campaigns around that in both local and regional markets.”

**CSR in Action at Lee Jeans**

In 1995, Lee Jeans approached Barkley with a problem that advertising could not solve. How could Lee take advantage of the growing trend of more casual dress codes in the workplace to sell more denim? Research showed low perception of the Lee brand by female consumers ages 24 to 49, the exact segment Lee wanted to reach.

Barkley’s recommendation was to make wearing jeans to work about supporting a cause, not a fashion statement—a concept that women in particular embrace. For one specific day, dubbed Lee National Denim Day, companies nationwide were challenged to let employees wear denim to work in exchange for their $5 donations to support the fight against breast cancer. That first year, more than 3,000 companies participated, raising $1.4 million, which far surpassed Lee’s $1 million goal. The numbers have continued to rise each year, with Lee National Denim Day raising more than $83 million since the effort started.

The campaign is refreshed each year with a new national celebrity spokesperson and an increased online presence. From a business perspective, the campaign has forged an emotional connection between Lee and its target consumers, increasing denim sales and focusing Lee’s overall philanthropic strategy. ★