

Meet the 27 most influential fixers in public relations at companies like Johnson & Johnson, Lenovo, and Coca-Cola

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- The public, investors, and regulators are demanding more of companies, making the public-relations function more important than ever.
- Business Insider identified the 27 most powerful PR pros managing the images of the highest-profile companies.
- They include communications chiefs from brands like Johnson & Johnson, Heineken, Lenovo, and Coca-Cola.

The public, investors, and regulators are demanding more of companies, making the public-relations function more important than ever.

Business Insider identified the 27 most influential figures in PR today. They're shaping public opinion of the biggest brands by wrangling the press, tamping down crises, promoting their employers' agenda, and experimenting with new tactics and strategies.

We identified these individuals through press coverage and our own reporting to find PR pros who are the best representatives of the profession.

The list includes public figures such as Josh Earnest, the former White House press secretary who's wrangled crisis after crisis at United Airlines; Lilita M. Esposito of Wendy's, who raised the bar for how brands use social media; and Michael Sneed, who has shepherded Johnson & Johnson through the baby-powder controversy.

Scroll down to read the full list, in alphabetical order by last name.

Dan Bartlett, Walmart



As EVP of corporate affairs at Walmart, Dan Bartlett has helped the world's largest company by revenue battle some of the most controversial issues of the day and a changing retail environment.

He [helped](#) roll out Walmart's announcements that it would stop selling some kinds of ammunition after two shootings at its stores in 2019 and its asking customers to stop openly carrying firearms in states where open carry is allowed. Industry observers [applauded](#) these actions, suggesting they would enhance Walmart CEO Doug McMillon's influence.

More recently, Bartlett has put his crisis chops to work as the pandemic forces Walmart to take [safety precautions](#) and increase [hiring](#) at its more than 11,500 stores.

Before Walmart, Bartlett was a longtime aide to George W. Bush, including serving as communications director and counselor to the president. Barlett also served as US CEO of Hill + Knowlton and president and CEO of Public Strategies.

Brandon Borrman, Twitter



Brandon Borrman, VP of communications at Twitter, has helped the company navigate hot-button issues like free speech on social media, where politics and culture wars collide.

Borrman managed messaging of Twitter's scrutinized policy after it [hid President Donald Trump's tweets that threatened violence](#) against Black Lives Matter protesters.

As criticism mounts against tech giants, Borrman is helping Twitter [defend](#) the open internet as the threat of regulation looms.

In 2018, Borrman helped managed CEO Jack Dorsey's [testimony](#) in Washington, where he was called "unflappable" and "the nerdy and earnest CEO who just wants to improve his company and its role in the world."

Craig Buchholz, General Motors



Craig Buchholz, SVP of global communications at General Motors, set three goals since joining in April, including establishing GM as a leader in electric and autonomous vehicles, which includes the unveiling of its Cadillac Lyriq.

But first he had to respond to the more immediate needs of manufacturing ventilators and PPE to help in the pandemic and creating a strategy to advance racial equality.

General Motors gave VP Mike Pence a [tour](#) of its Kokomo, Indiana, plant, and Buchholz helped GM get attention for its COVID-19 relief efforts with a "60 Minutes" [segment](#).

After George Floyd's death, GM CEO Mary Barra wrote a widely reported [letter](#) to employees, promising the company would be the "most inclusive company in the world." GM also pledged \$10 million to racial justice organizations and created an inclusion advisory board, of which Buchholz is a member.

Before GM, Buchholz led communications at P&G, where he tamped down on the Tide Pods Challenge, [fended](#) off the largest proxy contest in company history, and managed PR when P&G's divested more than 100 brands.

Jay Carney, Amazon



Since Jay Carney joined as SVP of corporate affairs five years ago, the behemoth has become not just a giant in ecommerce but also cloud computing, entertainment, livestreaming, and brick-and-mortar retail.

With that expansion, public scrutiny has only intensified, and under Carney, Amazon has gone on the offense.

The company [distributed](#) to local news stations a prepackaged segment promoting its health and safety efforts as it prepared to face scrutiny of warehouse workers' deaths from COVID-19. Nine local stations ran with the segment.

Carney also wrote a New York Times [op-ed](#) about then presidential candidate Bernie Sanders praising Amazon for raising its minimum wage to \$15 — a piece that was [criticized as "tone-deaf."](#)

The former White House press secretary also quarterbacked communications at Amazon during its search for a city to host its second headquarters, which ultimately blew up when New York rejected the deal.

Nick Clegg, Facebook



Nick Clegg, VP of global affairs and communications at Facebook, [brought a new openness](#) to the embattled social-media company when he arrived in 2018.

The UK Democrat leader turned corporate spokesman helped set up external board at Facebook — comprising academics, journalists, and political figures — to police how and when it removed content.

Clegg helped CEO Mark Zuckerberg draft a speech at Georgetown University, where he committed Facebook to free-speech principles and defended the company for that position himself.

Clegg [also has sparred](#) with the media over the July advertiser boycott against Facebook, saying Facebook had no incentive to tolerate hate speech. And despite creating an external board on moderating content, Clegg also was aware of Facebook's decision to remove a fact-check on right-wing news site Daily Wire, according to an [investigation](#) by Heated and Popular Information.

Corey duBrowa, Google



Corey duBrowa had no honeymoon period when he joined Google in April 2018 as VP of global communications and public affairs.

In less than a year, duBrowa had to handle controversies around Google's AI [work](#) with the Pentagon, an employee [walkout](#) over sexual-misconduct allegations, and a proposed search engine in China called Project [Dragonfly](#).

DuBrowa tamped down leaks in Google's freewheeling culture. He also revamped analysis of how politicians, consumers, and other audiences perceive Google to guide communications from Google, including CEO Sundar Pichai's hearings on Capitol Hill. DuBrowa helped coach Pichai and craft his messages for those hearings.

DuBrowa emphasizes Pichai's humble beginnings and how Google benefits communities like Oklahoma, where the company built a data center.

In his previous role at Starbucks, DuBrowa used his role to promote the coffee chain as committed to social good.

Josh Earnest, United Airlines



Former Obama White House press secretary Josh Earnest has fended off crisis after crisis at United Airlines, where he arrived as chief communications officer a year after a passenger was dragged off a plane.

In 2018, some United flyers [alleged](#) US Immigration officers used the airline to transport migrant children separated from their parents. The company asked federal officials to stop using their fleet for this practice and partnered with a nonprofit immigration group.

When United was criticized during [the pandemic](#) for cutting employee pay while taking stimulus money, it fought back by saying the stimulus package helped it keep staff and let flights continue. It also asked its union workers to voice their support to their local representatives.

While serving under Obama, Earnest was [voted](#) the best press secretary to work with in a Politico survey of White House correspondents.

Richard Edelman, Edelman



Under CEO Richard Edelman, the industry's biggest independent agency blew past firms owned by holding companies like WPP's Hill + Knowlton and Omnicom's Ketchum by betting big on digital and social media.

Edelman has won pitches as the lead creative agency for HP, Dove, the WNBCA, and others. One of its most prominent campaigns was Dove's Real Beauty Productions.

One of Edelman's pet projects, the Trust Barometer, became one of the few if not the only PR studies audiences outside the industry pay attention to.

Edelman's growth has slowed. Samsung, a marquee client with accounts worth tens of millions of dollars, left the agency, and so far, Edelman's bet on creative hasn't paid off in the way its bet on digital has.

Still, the CEO recently [told](#) Business Insider it's well positioned to take share from advertising by doubling down on creative, an area that PR is suited to in crises.

"We can actually be part of the news cycle with stories of companies and brands stepping up, of companies in some way changing their supply chains," he said.

Liliana M. Esposito, Wendy's



Wendy's raised the bar for how brands use social media, and much of the credit goes to Liliana Esposito.

She led the team that worked on the Wendy's "Nuggs for Carter" PR campaign, which showed the fast-food chain's irreverent Twitter roast was more than just a meme but had real-world value.

After a Nevada teen [asked](#) on Twitter how many retweets it'd take for him to get a year's worth of free nuggets in 2017, Wendy's said 18 million. Twitter users responded, quickly giving him the most-retweeted tweet of all time a month later, and engagement on Wendy's Twitter shot up 375% year over year, according to [PRWeek](#).

Internally, Esposito has pushed efforts like The Wendy's Foundation and initiatives to use greenhouse tomatoes and reduce antibiotics in its meat.

Esposito is also a crisis pro who has managed the public response to product recalls, cybersecurity incidents, litigation, and activist campaigns.

Mike Fernandez, Enbridge



Mike Fernandez is known for his high-profile work on sustainability issues, which are at the forefront at Enbridge, an energy infrastructure company with oil and natural gas pipelines spanning North America.

As SVP and chief communications officer, he helps the company trumpet its new focus on liquid natural gas, wind, and solar. Enbridge is facing lawsuits related to [an oil pipeline in Michigan](#) and a deadly gas pipeline [explosion](#) in Kentucky.

At Cargill, Fernandez helped tamp down accusations from activists about how it sourced soy, palm oil, cocoa, and other commodities, prompting the company to adopt a more sustainable approach and earning it a spot on Fortune's inaugural "Change the World" [list](#).

Upon Fernandez's exit from Cargill, chairman and CEO Greg Page said of his former comms chief, "He made me a better CEO."

At State Farm, he fended off class-action suits following Hurricane Katrina, and helped the company grow market share in the Gulf Coast and among Latino and Black communities.

Fernandez — widely considered the first US-born Latino to ever serve as the CCO of a Fortune 500 company (US West) — was also communications chief at Cigna and ConAgra Foods and US CEO of Burson-Marsteller and LLYC, a firm that helps brands communicate to Latin American audiences.

Jill Hazelbaker, Uber



Jill Hazelbaker, SVP of public affairs and marketing at Uber, [made a name for herself resurrecting](#) John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

From there, she rose to prominence as a Silicon Valley fixer on her ability to knit together teams, work across political divides, and dive into controversies like free speech at Google and internal culture issues at Uber.

At the ride-hailing company, Hazelbaker got a seat at the table as few PR pros have done by forging relationships with the management team and the board of directors.

For example, she signed a letter asking that Travis Kalanick take time off from the company. (Kalanick was forced to step down in a separate incident.) Hazelbaker was also a key advocate for Uber's 2019 safety report that revealed a problem with sexual assault in Uber rides.

Julie Henderson, Snap



Julie Henderson joined Snap in January 2019 as the beleaguered social-media company sought to turn itself around with a new leadership team.

She pushed Snap to be more open with the press, helping it get favorable coverage in outlets like Fast Company, which [named](#) it as the Most Innovative Company in 2020, and wrote that Snap CEO Evan Spiegel went from being "the cocky L.A. rich kid turned imperial CEO" into "grateful, thoughtful, self-critical, and, perhaps most of all, joyful."

Henderson also played a role in researching Gen Z's mental-health issues and spreading those findings internally, which led to Snap's product team to create an [app](#) on its platform with meditation app Headspace.

Before Snap, Henderson was at 21st Century Fox, where she handled communications around the \$71 billion sale of Fox assets to Disney, its split from News Corp. and crises like Gretchen Carlson's suit against Roger Ailes.

Dustee Jenkins, Spotify



With growing competition in the music-streaming business, Spotify has doubled down on podcast content, signing exclusivity deals with Joe Rogan, Amy Schumer, and Jemele Hill. As the global head of communications and PR at [Spotify](#), Dustee Jenkins has helped communicate this shift as a game changer for the company.

Spotify's move into podcasting has grown its advertising business, increased monthly users and engagement, and helped convert free listeners to paying subscribers.

Jenkins also [helped](#) sell Wall Street on Spotify's anticipated and unusual IPO, in which the company wanted to list directly on the New York Stock Exchange without offering new shares.

Before Spotify, Jenkins worked at Target and Hill + Knowlton Strategies.

Damon Jones, Procter & Gamble



As the communications chief at the world's largest advertiser, P&G chief communications officer Damon Jones uses his platform not only to drive equality for under-represented groups but also to spur growth.

Jones has pushed P&G's [mission](#) to "be a force for good and growth," which says the company will champion fairness and equality. He [joined](#) other blue-chip companies in the CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion initiative to foster discussion of racial diversity in 2017.

Declan Kelly, Teneo



Declan Kelly spent the past decade doing what he does best: building a PR agency.

Teneo, where he serves as chairman and CEO, positions itself as a one-stop shop for CEOs, including PR, investment banking, security, and corporate governance. It is said to charge monthly retainers as high as \$250,000.

He founded Teneo in 2011 with president Doug Band, both of whom have deep ties to the Democratic establishment, owing to their work with the Clintons. In 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton named Kelly the US Economic Envoy to Northern Ireland.

Since its founding, Teneo has acquired multiple agencies, expanding its footprint in the UK, US, Brazil, China, Africa, and other markets.

In 2019, Teneo replenished its war chest by selling itself to CVC Capital for a stake just over 50% in a deal that valued the agency at more than \$700 million. Teneo had eyed a \$1 billion IPO.

Kelly sold his own firm, Gallagher and Kelly, to Financial Dynamics and later helped FD go through a management buyout from Cordian in 2003. In 2006, Financial Dynamics sold itself to FTI Consulting, where Kelly became EVP and chief integration officer.

Torod Neptune, Lenovo



Torod Neptune has been on the forefront of modernizing communications by [using technology](#) to better understand how PR drives consumer behavior.

Chinese tech giant Lenovo enlisted him in 2017 as chief communications officer as the company [pivots](#) from selling hardware to selling a full suite of solutions and takes on established tech vendors like Dell, IBM, and Hewlett-Packard.

Neptune also uses his platform to promote diversity and inclusion in the PR industry, requiring agencies to provide gender and ethnicity staff data when they pitch for his company's business.

Neptune led Lenovo's first report on global diversity and inclusion, which released its annual goals to diversity its workforce, and launched the Lenovo Foundation. His work has also led to Lenovo winning two Cannes Lions.

Before Lenovo, Neptune served at Bank of America, most recently as SVP of global corporate marketing and communications. He was also WE's SVP and global public affairs leader and corporate VP of corporate communications at Verizon.

Neptune was director of strategic and crisis communications for the House of Representatives, where he modernized Congress' crisis communications and response playbook following the 9/11 terror attacks.

Beatriz Perez, Coca-Cola



Coca-Cola in 2017 laid out a plan to go beyond soda to sell water, juice, and other drinks, and a key figure in carrying out that strategy has been Beatriz Perez, who became SVP and chief communications, public affairs, sustainability and marketing assets officer that year.

Perez oversees the company's partnerships with the Olympics, Special Olympics, and FIFA, and leads its retail, licensing, and attractions portfolio.

Perez became Coca-Cola's first chief sustainability officer in 2011. Her projects include 5by20, whose goal was to bring 5 million women entrepreneurs into the company's supply chain by 2020.

Nigel Powell, Nike



Nigel Powell, EVP and chief communications officer at Nike, was central in catapulting Nike to the forefront of a discussion about racial injustice during the Colin Kaepernick controversy. It's that kind of PR savvy that has made Powell, who's been with Nike since 1999, an indispensable part of the Swoosh.

The New York Times [reported](#) Powell stopped Nike from cutting its contract with Kaepernick after the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback couldn't find another team to sign him after his protests against police brutality captured national attention.

Powell argued Nike would be worse off if the public thought it was siding with the NFL over Kaepernick than if it kept the contract.

His argument won out, and, at the recommendation of the ad agency Wieden & Kennedy, Kaepernick became the face of its "Just Do It" [campaign](#).

Nike's support of Black Lives Matter [boosted sales](#) immediately after the ad ran in 2018 and [strengthened](#) its brand in the years after.

Frank Shaw, Microsoft



Microsoft

Microsoft's [turnaround](#) is a testament to its shift to cloud, embrace of open source, and CEO Satya Nadella's leadership and also its ability to tell a good story. And for more than a decade, Frank Shaw has been that story's chief architect.

Among his peers, the corporate VP of communications has [been called](#) an "advocate for value of technology and what it can do in the world." Reporters have called Shaw an "invaluable" asset known for "his fast response time and his ability to [secure] interviews with top execs, as [Business Insider reported](#).

On the other hand, he's not been above sparring with critics of the company, [calling](#) The New York Times' review of Windows 8.1 "funny, inaccurate, opinionated in the skewed way only [the writer] can bring."

The Marine Corps. vet was key in [establishing](#) Microsoft's Military Affairs team to train fellow vets in skills needed in the tech industry. At WE, he was president of the Microsoft account, the agency's largest.

Michael Sitrick, Sitrick & Co.



For as much as [\\$1,100 an hour](#), you can acquire the services of crisis wrangler Mike Sitrick, chairman and CEO of Sitrick & Co.

In [1992](#), Sitrick set a new standard for tamping down a crisis when supermarket chain Food Lion hired him. The ABC News program "Primetime Live" aired a segment about Food Lion's food-handling practices.

Sitrick wrested outtakes of the segment from ABC, using the footage against the broadcaster and "effectively turning a story about bad meat into a story about bad journalism," according to [The New York Times](#). For years the case was taught at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.

Sitrick clients have encompassed the controversial Papa John's founder John Schnatter, R Kelly, and the Church of Scientology. He briefly counseled disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

Laurie Schalow, Chipotle



Laurie Schalow, chief corporate affairs and food-safety officer at Chipotle, joined the company in 2017 after an E coli crisis and has helped drive the burrito chain's comeback.

While the company implemented new safety procedures, Schalow scored a [feature](#) in Time magazine titled "Inside Chipotle's Plan to Make You Love It Again."

Schalow's efforts also [helped Chipotle get](#) the No. 1 rank in the "Ipsos' Consumer Health & Safety Index" among fast-food restaurants during the coronavirus pandemic in July.

While Schalow [gets out the word that](#) Chipotle is keeping diners safe, the company's stock has been at an all-time high and digital sales have soared.

Before joining Chipotle, Schalow was VP of public affairs at Yum Brands.

Michael Sneed, Johnson & Johnson



Michael Sneed, EVP, global corporate affairs and chief communications officer at Johnson & Johnson, is handling perhaps the healthcare giant's biggest PR crisis ever: the baby-powder lawsuits.

As more plaintiffs came forward alleging J&J's baby powder caused ovarian cancer, Johnson & Johnson [elevated](#) Sneed to the executive committee in 2018. That year, the company unleashed [an aggressive PR strategy](#) that included a microsite, promoted tweets, full-page ads in newspapers, an online statement, and interviews.

Now, Johnson & Johnson is promoting its [race](#) to find a vaccine to COVID-19. In late July, it [announced](#) it was moving to human-safety trials after conducting a study of a vaccine candidate on monkeys.

Stacey Tank, Heineken



Few PR pros move out of communications, but Stacey Tank took that leap when the Home Depot promoted her to lead its multibillion-dollar home-services business.

After exiting four unprofitable business lines, Tank helped [return](#) the remaining businesses to double-digit growth.

Today, Tank is chief corporate affairs and transformation officer at Heineken, where she oversees public affairs, sustainable development, and global communications. She helps the Dutch brewer with its transformation initiatives.

In an earlier stint at Heineken, running corporate relations in the US from 2012 to 2015, she [helped](#) the company net 2.8 billion unique media impressions in 2013 and streamlined its PR and 13 other brand teams.

Tank also had roles at GE such as corporate audit staff associate, corporate audit staff manager, and senior finance manager for GE Water.

David Tovar, McDonald's



The pandemic has amplified David Tovar's importance as one of the largest fast-food chains introduces safety precautions at 14,000 locations in the US and [prepares](#) to hire 260,000 workers.

The VP of US communications has been [communicating](#) with updates on how McDonald's is keeping customers and employees safe, while [wrangling](#) a crisis after in-store workers demanded gloves and masks. McDonald's ended up distributing more than 100 million masks to them.

Tovar [joined](#) McDonald's in 2019, having served as communications leader at Sprint. He added US government relations to his purview in 2019, which includes US brand engagement and system communications.

Margit Wennmachers, Andreessen Horowitz



Few if any PR pros have done more to shape the image of tech companies — and Silicon Valley at large — than Andreessen Horowitz operating partner Margit Wennmachers.

Instead of pushing away the press, which many tech founders used to do, Wennmachers taught them to use journalists to tell their stories, [CNN](#) reported.

Her work not only made Andreessen Horowitz a storied name in venture capital, she's also helped build brands Facebook and Skype.

Wired [wrote that she](#) "has a sixth sense for communications strategy" and has "worked with, advised, or broken bread with nearly everyone who has endeavored to build—or write about—a startup."

Wennmachers was already a boldfaced name after having worked at influential Hill + Knowlton Strategies division Blanc & Otus. She also cofounded the OutCast Agency with Caryn Marooney, the former communications head at Facebook and current general partner at Coatue Management.

Rachel Whetstone, Netflix



Rachel Whetstone's political background and roles at Silicon Valley's most prominent and controversial companies had made her one of few PR pros to be a regular media subject herself.

In her native UK, she was a [Tory power broker](#), having worked alongside former Prime Minister David Cameron and former MP George Osborne.

In the US, her name is associated with Silicon Valley. At Google, she worked with former CEO Eric Schmidt; at Facebook, CEO Mark Zuckerberg and COO Sheryl Sandberg; and at Uber, CEO Travis Kalanick.

At Netflix, where she's now chief communications officer, Whetstone is helping the company maintain its corporate [reputation](#). She helps promote its growing slate of original content and reinforce its leadership position as new streaming video companies charge into the space.

Richard "Jake" Siewert, Goldman Sachs



Richard "Jake" Siewert, global head of corporate communications at Goldman Sachs, has the herculean task of defending the investment bank, which just paid the Malaysian government \$3.9 billion to [settle](#) the bank's involvement in the 1MDB scandal.

Few in PR could handle a controversy of that scope besides the battle-tested Siewert.

Siewert joined in 2012 to [overhaul](#) the image of then-CEO Lloyd Blankfein and had to [do damage control after](#) a New York Times [op-ed](#) by a former executive decried the bank's "toxic and destructive" culture.

Siewert previously worked in the Treasury and as White House press secretary.