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**Special Edition**

THE  
**2023** **Ragan**  
**Game  
& Changers**

**Comms pros influencing  
the future of communications**



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**HALLEY KNIGGE**  
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**LOU DUBOIS**  
The Home Depot



**MICHAEL KAYE**  
OkCupid



**SARAH ALSPACH**  
bluebird bio



**STEPHANIE LOWENTHAL**  
Builder.ai

# Meet the 2023 Game Changers!



**TIPH TURPIN**  
Expedia Group



**BILLY RIELLY**  
Consumer Bankers Association



**VELEISA PATTON BURRELL**  
Denny's Corporation



**MARIELLA KAPSASKIS**  
BMW of North America



**FELICIA SALAZAR**  
U.S. Department of the Interior



**MARC JOHNSON**  
Meta



**KELLY WILLIAMSON**  
APCO Worldwide



**MORGAN PAINTER-EFFRON**  
NBCUniversal

## GAME-CHANGER: IT'S A SPORTS TERM THAT VAULTED INTO THE BUSINESS WORLD IN THE 1990S

Much like athletes who continually push the boundaries and set new bars for what is physically possible, the visionaries that shine brightest in the business world are those who are always seeking what's next, what's more, what's just out of reach. And much like outstanding athletes, they sure know how to wow a crowd.

Such is the case for Ragan's inaugural class of Game Changers, sponsored by Omnicom. These rare individuals are the home run-hitting, touchdown-scoring, world-class sprinters of their organizations and the communications industry at large, living as an example of what their colleagues, contemporaries, employees and mentees can strive for.

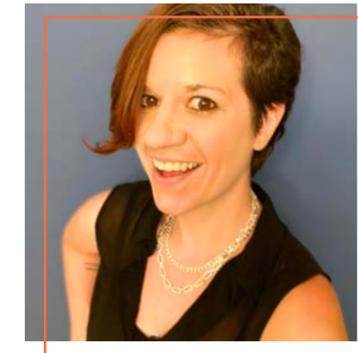
These 16 leaders have forged a lasting impact across industries—technology, entertainment, automotive, media, government, agencies and beyond.

Internal and external, corporate and advocacy, for nonprofits, brands, agencies and governments, these Game Changers create communications that span the globe, not to mention barely tapped digital spheres.

In this class, you'll meet communicators whose storytelling has resulted in powerful, people-first documentaries, empowered underrepresented communities to reach new heights, swept the awards scene, championed successful hybrid work environments, illuminated the optimism to be found in AI—and in one case, literally taken over a stadium, just to cement the sports metaphor.

Through their work they score every day, changing the way organizations engage with their employees and their customers, how they face global-scale challenges and embrace new technology, how they innovate and create and transform the world around them, how they uphold their commitments to do good work for the good of all.

That's why I am honored to present our 2023 awardees. Read on to discover just how these leaders are changing the game.



**Jess Zafarris**  
Director of Content  
Ragan and PR Daily





**Angie Hu**

**Vice President Communications  
Synchrony**

Hu is dedicated to promoting Synchrony’s people-centric culture and, more broadly, shaping the future of work and DE&I policies, as well as tech advancements in the comms industry and the workplace as a whole. With roots in national TV news and more than 18 years of experience in public relations and public affairs, Hu’s expertise spans the corporate, government, and philanthropic sectors. In particular, she played a pivotal role in managing change communications during the pandemic and navigated hybrid policies in the following period. Synchrony stands out as one of the few banks with a hybrid and adaptable work environment, and Hu played a crucial part in conveying this distinctive approach, which was unusual for the sector. She has proven to be a guiding force in navigating the delicate task of narrating a company’s culture story amid a backdrop of pressing social issues, including DE&I, the #MeToo movement, and significant Supreme Court decisions. She previously directed global communications for the IBM Foundation and served as the New York City press secretary for U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand.

## Christina Magrini

**Vice President of Corporate  
Communications  
Forbes**

With more than a decade of experience in the communications industry, Magrini is responsible for media placements, brand messaging development, product, editorial, and business PR, media training, crisis communications and implementing thought leadership programs for Forbes. She oversees comms for its editorial and franchise lists, its executives, and its products and live events, and in particular, is key in leading the publicity efforts for Forbes’ Under 30 Summit. Her collaborative, cross-departmental efforts have earned Forbes coverage and interviews with leaders in publications including Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. She has led brand initiatives such as the ForbesPR Twitter account and its Forbes.com Corporate Communications page. She is also co-vice president of The Association of Magazine Media’s MPA Next, a community for up-and-coming professionals in the magazine media industry.



**Damon Jones**

**Chief Communications Officer  
Procter & Gamble**

Since he started at Procter & Gamble, the world’s largest consumer goods company, in 1997, Jones has soared from an associate communications manager in its fabric and home care division all the way to organization-wide leadership as Chief Communications Officer. In his role, Jones guides the behemoth through the complex nuances of brand and corporate communications, digital and social media, stakeholder engagement, issues advocacy and crisis management. He has elevated the company as a force for good and growth, and is known for driving brand and business success through reputation management and relationship-building. In 2020, he was ranked No. 1 on PR Week’s Power List 2020. In his life beyond P&G, he serves as director for the The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority and is a Trustee at Xavier University, and in the past he has served as a director for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, and was a member of the Cincinnati Human Services Advisory Commission.

## Halley Knigge

**Director, Co-op Communications  
REI**

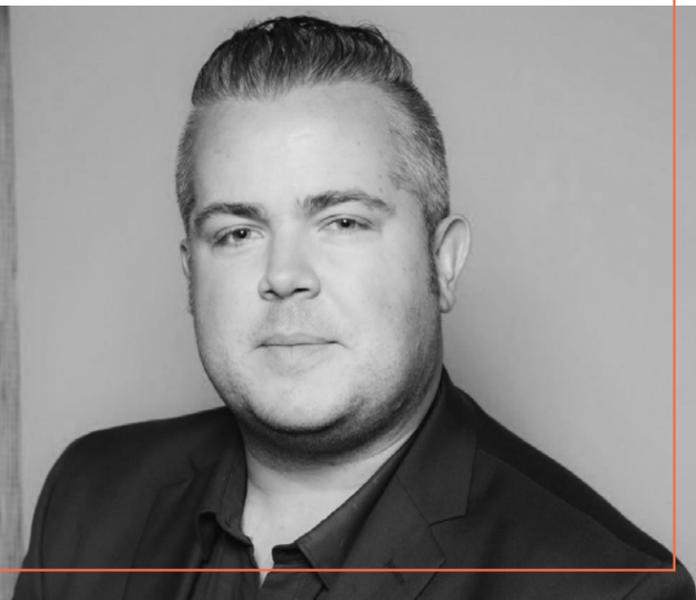
Knigge leads the REI Co-op, a 13-person internal- and external-focused team responsible for communications, including messaging around major brand moments such as #OptOutside. Her team’s work plays a pivotal role in highlighting its passionate employees and helping current and future members see themselves as part of the co-op and outdoor community. She is known for her leadership crafting impactful communications around the company’s innovative work anywhere policy and ability to tie messaging back to ESG and brand purpose. In her prior work at Alaska Airlines, she charted a course through an airline merger, told rich travel stories and even ghost-wrote tweets for a certain famous Seattle quarterback. Beyond that, her multifaceted career has spanned healthcare, nonprofits, education and daily newspapers. She says she grew up on Mr. Rogers, so her no. 1 core value is to always be a helper, and as a result, she currently serves on the boards of the Tacoma Urban League and the Washington Trails Association.



## Lou Dubois

**Sr. Director, Head of Content, Creative & HD Story Labs and HDTV The Home Depot**

Dubois spent the first chapter of his career leading social and digital newsgathering and strategy at Sports Illustrated, Inc. Magazine, the Associated Press, Social Media Today and NBC News, then pivoted to storytelling for brand such as Hilton and NBCUniversal. In his current role at Home Depot, he leads a team of more than 30 creative professionals who craft stories of the brand's history, products and employees. He is aided in telling human-centric narratives by his perspectives from broadcast media, with powerful results shining through in the brand's disaster relief documentary, "Hope Builds," which focuses on three communities torn apart by devastating natural disasters and the role the brand played in disaster relief. He also led the creation of the episodic series "Behind the Apron," which examines stories of perseverance, personal growth and community service to be found in the lives of Home Depot's 500,000 employees. Dubois mindfully embeds content creation across functions from the outset by focusing on getting maximum use from content for things like employer branding, ESG and more.



## Michael Kaye

**Head of Brand Marketing and Communications, Archer and Global Director of Brand Marketing and Communications OkCupid**

Among his accomplishments with the brand, Kaye and his team supported the Biden Harris Administration's efforts to increase vaccinations among Gen Z and Millennials by releasing the "I'm Vaccinated" profile badge for all daters who self-reported that they've had at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination. Everyone who added the badge to their profile in the first 48 hours also received a free Boost, and as a result, the people who displayed their vaccination status were 14 percent more likely to get a match. He has kept the 20-year-old brand updated and relevant in recent months by using ChatGPT to write OkCupid's famous matching questions, a project that got more than 2.5 million responses. Kaye is an active advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, an adjunct professor at New York University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and previously served on the board of the Human Rights Campaign.

## Sarah Alspach

**Senior Vice President, External Affairs bluebird bio**

At bluebird bio, Alspach develops external engagement spanning corporate communications, investor relations, patient advocacy, government affairs and more to advance the company's mission to help families through life-saving gene therapy. She has led the organization's communications through transformations including the FDA's approval and the organization's launch of two first-in-class gene therapies in 2022, with more on the horizon. In her prior roles she has led communications at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and at GlaxoSmithKline, where she spearheaded communications, corporate brand and reputation, and philanthropic giving in the US. She serves as an advisor on the Ad Council's Advisory Committee on Public Issues, and she is a member of the Arthur Page Society.



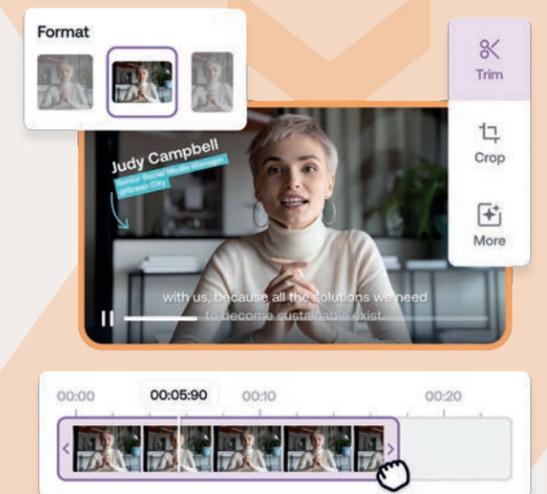
## Congratulations to the Class of 2023 Game Changers!

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## Stephanie Lowenthal

**Global Head of Communications  
Builder.ai**

Lowenthal's 20 years of communications experience spans in-house roles at organizations such as Trivago and Nasdaq's Listings Group and MarketSite as well as agency roles at FleishmanHillard and Peppercomm. In her current role, she oversees internal, external, executive, platform and investor communications, and is guiding the brand's growth and branding across Europe, Singapore and the Middle East. Her forward-thinking mindset has established the brand as an early adopter and pioneer in the AI space, as well as uplifting its CEO as a voice of positivity and balance in the often-contentious and confusing conversations around this burgeoning technology. Her work in partnership development with companies such as Microsoft helped Builder.ai earn a place on the 2023 Fast Company list of Most Innovative Companies, as well as being awarded "Hottest AI Startup" and 2022's "Hottest Scale-Up" at the Europas for Europe's successful tech start-ups. At Trivago, she similarly pushed the limits of what's possible by establishing its sponsorship and partnership with Chelsea Football Club and launching an activation on the Stamford Bridge soccer pitch—an award-winning project that became the biggest sponsorship activation the location had ever seen. In 2022, she was honored as a member of Ragan's Top Women in Communications.

## Dr. Tiph Turpin

**Global Vice President of Employee Communications  
Expedia Group**

In her role at Expedia Group, Dr. Turpin creates internal storytelling for the organization, positioning the brand as a force for good, as well as guiding communications for its executives, guiding its brand and visual identity, initiating employee events and experiences and overseeing strategic operations and measurement. Prior to that, she spent six years at Mars overseeing internal communications, corporate affairs and strategic initiatives for leadership and the company's board. Through all of it, she has placed mentorship, advocacy and corporate representation for other women of color at the heart of her work. Her journey has been award-studded, with her efforts earning her honors in Ragan and PR Daily's Top Women in Communications Awards, PR Week's 40 Under 40, as well as awards from the PRSA, Washington Women in Public Relations and more. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Global Glimpse, which provides international travel, cultural immersion, leadership and learning opportunities to high school students.



## Billy Rielly

**Senior Vice President,  
Head of Public Affairs  
Consumer Bankers Association**

Rielly's communications leadership roles have had a tangible impact on the public and the messaging by which financial and government decisions are communicated to them. In his role at the CBA, he is responsible for amplifying industry policies and positioning the organization and its member banks as fixtures of the communities they serve and led communications during the recent market volatility to counter misinformation. His prior achievements in the political and public affairs realm during the pandemic and the paycheck protection program equipped him to lead messaging and media efforts for the organization: He has not only worked on multiple political campaigns and led public affairs efforts for corporate advocacy clients, but also served as a Special Assistant and Communications Director in Congress.

## Veleisa Patton Burrell

**Senior Director, Public Relations & Crisis  
Denny's Corporation**

Patton Burrell, who has recently shifted to a new role as Senior Director, Public Relations & Crisis at Denny's Corporation, has in recent years been a powerful champion and advocate for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion as Senior Vice President for FleishmanHillard Dallas. She was critical in leading FleishmanHilliard's DE&I offering, True MOSAIC, which centers on imbedding DE&I into client narratives. She launched the Dallas chapter of ColorComm, a professional network for women of color in communications, and served as the inaugural executive director. At PRSA Dallas, she has served as programming chair and board member, and been honored as a 40 under 40 honoree. She brings her passion for wellness to life through teaching yoga at Black Swan Yoga, a community-driven, donation-based yoga studio. She owned and operated a marketing communications firm, Narrative Evolution, where she worked with the WNBA team the Dallas Wings and collegiate sports marketing firm Learfield, as well as startups Kanarys and Sandbox Commerce. Her talents lie in helping clients clearly tell their value through owned storytelling consistently across mediums, garnering them earned media and improving their reputation with their employees, partners, and clients and industry peers.



In her role with BMW Group, Kapsaskis and her team have leapt at the chance to accelerate into an all-electric future, with their messaging powering a message of transformation and innovation to both internal and external innovations. She has championed communications around all-new developments, including a color-changing car that debuted at CES, while also motivating teams through tactics such as exciting improv exercises, humor-based workshops and dialogue-centric townhalls—not to mention carrying corporate messaging and purpose through every touchpoint and audience. Although her team oversees the North American market, her impact reaches across the globe as they develop worldwide cohesion amid rapid and ever-changing markets. She serves as a force of stability in this whirlwind, connecting a diverse, hybrid and widely distributed team as they have navigated pandemic-era supply chain challenges, industry shifts and more. Prior to their time at BMW, she has proven a force to be reckoned with across fashion, luxury and automotive—notably Lands’ End and Mercedes-Benz USA—both in-house and with agencies.



**Mariella Kapsaskis**

**Head of Corporate Communications  
BMW of North America**

**Felicia Salazar**

**Deputy Director of Communications  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Salazar is leading the way by communicating about issues that matter to everyday Americans including climate change, working family priorities, matters impacting indigenous communities and more. Trusted by her colleagues as a talented communicator and a relentless worker, Salazar has a reputation for crafting beautiful, heart-felt prose and uplifting, unifying speeches under pressure—messaging that generates a feeling of belonging not always typical or expected of those working in government. Prior to joining the Biden-Harris administration, Salazar served as Communications Director for Rep. Deb Haaland in the House of Representatives where she leveraged breaking news, ran press outreach, managed social media and led national and local communication strategy.



**Marc Johnson**

**Vice President, Corporate Communications  
Meta**

In his 20-year career, Johnson has emerged as a transformative leader and innovator in this discipline. His accomplishments include leading Meta’s rebrand from Facebook, as well as guiding the company through organizational shifts and empowering employees to become informed advocates of the company’s mission. Before his role at Meta, Johnson worked on APCO’s Global Leadership Team, leading the New York office and managing high-stakes communications and public affairs challenges for a multitude of major organizations, as well as launching programs such as APCO’s digital research and analytics program, competency model, career growth program, and data anthropology group. He has created powerful communications initiatives for Audi of America, IKEA, Red Bull and more, and he has driven comms strategy and campaigns through work with the Government of Malaysia, UNICEF and Anheuser-Busch. Marc was honored PR Week’s 40 Under 40 in 2015, has been named a Page Society Future Leader, and was ranked #5 on The Observer’s Power PR List in 2020. He serves on the board of directors at America’s Charities, Gideon’s Promise and Hampton University Alumni Association.



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**Kelly Williamson**

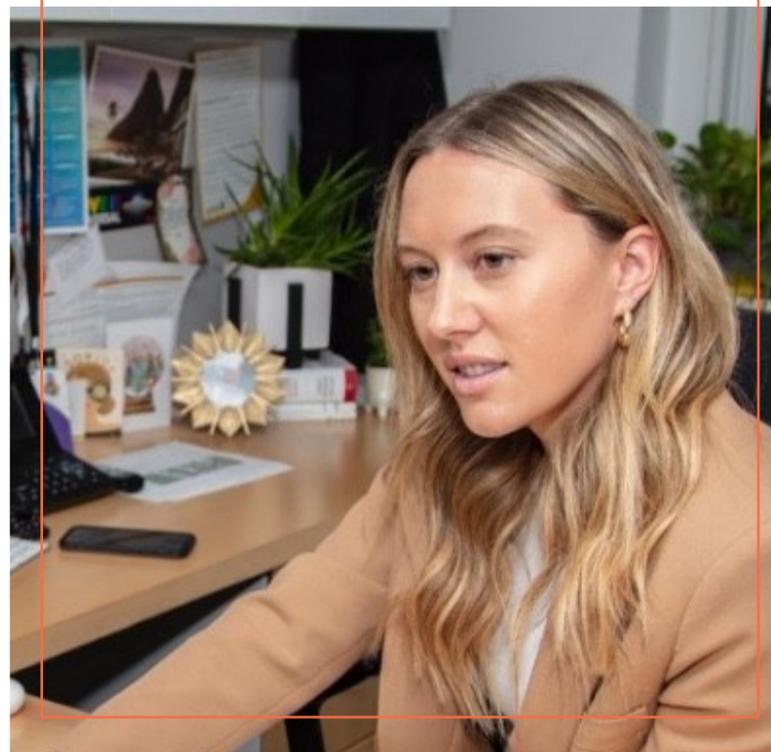
**President, North America  
APCO Worldwide**

Williamson started her career at APCO as an intern in 1999, but quickly skyrocketed through roles and ranks to her executive role running global teams while training colleagues around the world and serving clients through her work building and protecting reputation through corporate, public affairs and issues management programs. As the youngest of the 15 members of APCO's Global Leadership Team, she's well positioned to infuse its initiatives with forward-thinking initiatives such as pioneering APCO's Raleigh presence and growing it into a flourishing office; galvanizing new and creative ideas from around the world by judging APCO's inaugural Global Idea Pitch Competition; or simply challenging herself, her clients and her managers to think bigger and act more boldly. Her tenure at APCO has also included leading a global multi-million dollar technology account across more than 40 geographies, and building a coalition of local nonprofits in North Carolina and successfully advocating for them to retain their tax-exempt status throughout multiple legislative sessions. She was recently named a Top Women in Communications Awards 2022 in the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Champion category; a Champion in the 2018 PRWeek Hall of Femme; and a 2018 Top Women in PR by PR News.

## **Morgan Painter-Effron**

**Vice President, Corporate  
Communications  
NBCUniversal**

At NBCU, Painter-Effron continually revolutionizes the way the company, its many brands and franchises, and its leadership connect with and unify employees and consumers. Over the course of seven years, she has charged through the ranks at the entertainment and media giant, establishing and promoting mission-critical communications, content creation and story-telling around purpose, policy and priorities. She touts major wins for NBCU, including its sweep of the most recent Emmy Awards. Even before that, she was no stranger to media and entertainment, but her work has also spanned investor relations, publicity, social media, internal and executive communications and beyond. She has volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and Make-A-Wish.



# Omnicom

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# CONGRATS TO THE 2023 GAME CHANGERS!

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Our PR Network encompasses 19 communications firms and 6,300 professionals, with specialties ranging from public relations to public affairs, global public health strategy, management consulting, change management and language strategy.



# **CONGRATS TO THE CLASS OF 2023 GAME CHANGERS!**

Read all about the Game Changers at [commsweek.com/game-changers](https://commsweek.com/game-changers)

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