



Public Affairs & Issue Advocacy | Political Communications Strategy | Corporate Public Relations | Speechwriting

Rise Above the Noise

You don't just want people to hear you. You want them to listen.

Barraged as we are with news clips and op-eds that get linked, blogged, posted, tweeted and re-tweeted on a minute-to-minute basis, that's a lot to ask for. Countless voices across the nation drown each other out in the echochamber of modern media. Would-be revolutions can wind up footnotes on corporate memos, and reputations can die or reincarnate in the time it takes to post a Facebook status.

For businesses and agenda-setters worldwide, this all amounts to one important question: "How do we rise above the noise and really make an impact?"

That's where we come in.

Drawing from a wealth of public relations experience in political, advocacy and corporate arenas, New Heights Communications spearheads creative and downright effective communications campaigns that infiltrate national conversations and direct them to our clients' goals. Synchronizing the buzz means harmonizing the noise. Suddenly you're listened to, not just heard.

We service clients in both the nonprofit and for-profit spheres, leading projects which range from political campaign strategy to executive speechwriting. We've worked for CEOs, elected officials, political candidates from the presidential to local level, and progressive organizations from 527 groups to major national unions.

Christy Setzer, President and CEO

Christy Setzer brings more than a decade of experience providing smart, creative, and hard-hitting communications strategies to the political, advocacy and corporate arenas. From strategic planning to speechwriting, her work can be seen in the messages delivered by CEOs, elected officials from the presidential to local level, and a variety of progressive organizations— from 527 groups to major national unions.



Christy has served as spokesperson for three presidential campaigns—including as Iowa press secretary for Vice President Al Gore, spokeswoman for former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, and national press secretary for Senator Christopher J. Dodd. In each of these roles, Christy garnered national media attention for her candidates, resulting in coverage on CNN, MSNBC, and ABC's "Good Morning America"; and in the pages of the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post.

Christy founded New Heights Communications in May 2010. To combine the company's game-changing media campaigns with top-notch speechwriting, she negotiated a merger with Inkwell Strategies. As head of the newly expanded company, she continues to play a central role in shaping national discourse, having appeared on "Fox and Friends" on Fox News Channel, "The Big Picture" with Thom Hartmann, and "Ring of Fire" with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Samantha James, Managing Director

Samantha James serves as Managing Director for New Heights Communications. Samantha has long worked with nonprofit and progressive organizations, primarily those engaged in anti-poverty work. In that capacity, she has built coalitions, directed congressional outreach and external affairs, and examined and legal and policy issues - researching and writing reports, online materials and a federal bill. Most recently, she worked with U.S. Chamber Watch and the Public Participation Project. She holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from American University in Washington, DC, and a JD from Stanford Law School in California.

Jordana Merran, Communications Specialist

Previously at Burson-Marsteller Public Relations, where she worked on legislative campaigns for Microsoft and acted as deputy project manager for Ford Motor Company's U.S. grassroots communications program, Jordana brings extensive agency experience and knowledge of grassroots public relations, corporate messaging, and regional media landscapes to the firm. She is a regular contributor to K Street Kate, writes a biweekly arts column for We Love DC, and has contributed several pieces to thedcfamilysource.com. She graduated from Vassar College with a degree in economics.

Danny Fersh, Communications Specialist

Danny Fersh, a Magna Cum Laude graduate of Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, has worked in professional communications since May 2011. He previously worked at Inkwell Strategies, a premiere DC-area speechwriting and executive communications firm, where he wrote for clients at the highest levels of government, business, academia and the non-profit sector. While at Syracuse, Danny authored a weekly humor column for SU's award-winning independent student newspaper, *The Daily Orange*. Since joining in April 2012, Danny has brought his speechwriting and communication expertise, a big smile, and the occasional dance move to the New Heights team.

Raising Awareness: Mehri and Skalet, PLLC

The Situation

Mehri & Skalet, PLLC approached New Heights Communications with a case they filed on behalf of several female plaintiffs against Ruth's Chris Steak House, alleging sex discrimination. To attract additional potential class members and hold Ruth's Chris publicly accountable for its discriminatory employment practices, Mehri & Skalet engaged New Heights Communications to generate news coverage surrounding a recent victory in the case, where a local judge allowed the plaintiffs to request class action status.

Our Approach

NHC first approached local business press in both Washington, DC (where the suit was filed) and Orlando, Florida (the location of Ruth's Chris headquarters) with the story, as well as national press that had shown an interest in the similar Wal-Mart v. Dukes lawsuit.

While both these angles proved successful on their own, New Heights Communications was able to strengthen the story by drawing on the news of presidential candidate Herman Cain's numerous sex scandals while Chair of the National Restaurant Association. New Heights Communications approached several employment-and-women-in-the-workplace-specific columnists and reporters to discuss the Ruth's Chris case in the broader context of sex discrimination in the restaurant industry as a whole.

Results

By targeting reporters receptive to employment and discrimination legal issues and capitalizing on relevant national media stories, New Heights Communications generated coverage of the client's lawsuit in major news outlets including MSNBC, Forbes, and Reuters, as well as local coverage in the Washington and Orlando Business Journals. These high-profile pieces were in turn picked up by a number of legal and restaurant news outlets—such as LawyersandSettlements.com and Chain-StoreAge.com; and even garnered the attention of other private law firms, furthering the impact of New Heights Communications's original outreach and elevating Mehri & Skalet's visibility among its peers.

Driving Change: U.S. Chamber Watch

The Situation

Formed in June 2010, U.S. Chamber Watch is a progressive watchdog organization that seeks to hold the U.S. Chamber of Commerce accountable for its political activities. Whether that means exposing undisclosed payoffs to right-wing figures or spotting anti-women trends in the Chamber's decision-making, U.S. Chamber Watch does the research and reporting necessary to keep the public's eye on Chamber activities. Acting as communications director for U.S. Chamber Watch, New Heights was called on to jumpstart the two-fold process of identifying Chamber weaknesses and developing hard-hitting media campaigns in response to each.

Our Approach

We first determined that a primary purpose of U.S. Chamber Watch is to educate the public and the business community about the U.S. Chamber's political reality. To this end, we researched, reported on and publicized a wide array of subject matter, often on complex issues, including election finance law, nuanced tax policy and secret political activity. For example, our staff wrote and released a Chamber Watch report entitled, "The U.S. Chamber of Commerce: Leading the Charge in Electing a Republican Congress." Timed for release just after Election Day 2010, the report highlighted the central role the Chamber played during the 2010 election cycle in electing Republicans to the House and Senate.

Furthermore, as a watchdog organization, U.S. Chamber Watch must reach a diverse array of audiences. New Heights targets and packages our materials for these specific audiences, which include coalition members, progressive activists, legislators, investors and the business community – not to mention the broader press and public.

In addition to orchestrating campaigns around Chamber Watch issues, New Heights seamlessly integrates with Chamber Watch staff in our handling of day-to-day tasks. We developed and spearheaded Chamber Watch's social media presence, collaborating with staff to develop website content and promotional materials. We handle all daily blogging, tweeting and updates to coalition members. New Heights President Christy Setzer serves as Chamber Watch's spokeswoman, and handles all press inquiries. More than a consultant who completes discrete projects, New Heights engages with Chamber Watch on important strategic and tactical decisions for the organization as a whole.

Results

New Heights' well-researched, creative and thoughtfully targeted media outreach campaigns on a host of Chamber issues have made U.S. Chamber Watch the go-to source for education on the Chamber's political involvement. The U.S. Chamber itself acknowledged our effectiveness, when it was revealed that it was engaged in a \$2 million campaign to spy on and discredit U.S. Chamber Watch, noting in an internal memo, "All of U.S. Chamber Watch's tactics...have hindered the CoC's efforts, but their messaging campaigns continue to be the most effective."

Creating Interest: Chesapeake Bay Candle Company/BlissLiving Home

The Situation

Mei Xu had built out her Maryland-based candle-making business from a two-person basement operation to a \$100 million-a-year home décor empire. Yet despite her remarkable success, the story of Xu's two companies, the Chesapeake Bay Candle Company and BlissLiving Home, remained relatively unknown to the public or the media save for a handful of articles in Baltimore-area press and trade publications. Xu was ready to take her media operation to the next level, and position herself as the CEO of a major player in home goods.

Our Approach

In addition to her impressive business acumen, Xu held unique and extensive experience promoting US-China business relations and cultural exchanges as a member of the US-China Business Council. NHC wove this into a two-pronged strategy to secure media coverage for Xu and her brands: 1) Framing Chesapeake Bay Candle and BlissLiving Home as small business success stories at a time when the economy was stagnating, and 2) Positioning Xu as an expert not only on business strategy but US-China relations as a whole.

NHC seized a number of timely opportunities to implement this latter approach, including pitching Mei Xu to speak on the Chinese President's visit to the US; and to share her own insights on the "Tiger Mom," whose controversial child-rearing advice made headlines and piqued American media interest in Asian culture.

Results

NHC's efforts resonated with some of the most coveted of local and national media outlets, including [Fox News Channel](#), [Bloomberg BusinessWeek](#), [TBD's "Let's Talk Live,"](#) [MSNBC.com](#), [Washington Life](#), and [BNet](#). Not only was Chesapeake Bay Candle/BlissLiving Home recognized as a premier home décor brand, but Mei Xu was identified as an expert on business issues far beyond the scope of her company alone, guaranteeing endless media opportunities for the future.

Inspiring Leaders: 2012 New England College of Business Commencement Speech

Delivered by NECB President Howard Horton

Graduates: Here you sit, the proud owners of brand-new degrees in business. You really earned them.

Unlike some who go to school for business as full-time students fresh out of high school, you earned your degrees while juggling other real-life responsibilities. You piled this intensive program on top of your already overflowing lives. Lives packed with spouses and jobs, kids and parents, too many bills to pay and too few hours in the day.

Each of you has earned the respect of the whole college community for making it here today. And, to the friends and families and support networks in the audience, you too have earned our respect, and our gratitude, for standing by your loved ones as they pursued their dreams and secured their degrees.

Which begs the question: why would you all – graduates, families, friends – invest so much into this dream? Why would you juggle jobs, and late nights with the baby, and walking the dog, with drafting, and modeling, and honing your Excel skills?

It's because you have a passion for business. And that passion is part of a centuries-long tradition of enterprise in this country: a tradition to build up and beyond, to make dreams and hopes a reality. Just listen to how business has always played a role in our collective imagination – in our collective idea of what America is built on.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson said, "Agriculture, manufacturers, commerce, and navigation, the four pillars of our prosperity, are then most thriving when left most free to individual enterprise."

150 years later, President Calvin Coolidge said, "The business of America is business."

And just last month, Karen Mills, the US Small Business Administrator, said, "America's greatest strength has always been rooted in the ingenuity of our small businesses, the imagination and diversity of our entrepreneurs and the productivity of the American worker."

For more than a century – 103 years, to be exact - the New England College of Business and Finance has been equipping students to join in the American pursuit of business.

And over the past 103 years, two important things have changed: Everything, and Nothing.

First, let's talk about how everything has changed. When NECB was founded, the Model T was beginning its second year of production, and the Wright Brothers produced the first Model A for the U.S. military – the very first plane purchased by the government.

This year, Ford released its first electric car, and Boeing alone sold \$19 billion worth of jets to the US government.

Today's marketplace is filled with businesses that are household names, but which we couldn't even have dreamed of a century ago - some that seemed inconceivable even a decade ago. Many of you will go on to lead these industries. And, in ten years, some of you will be leading fields we can't even imagine today.

So yes, it feels like everything has changed. But if we look to our real leaders in business today, do they not share something with the business icons of the past? This, graduates, is where nothing has changed.

American business leaders are true leaders in our society. In a land without kings or czars, our heroes, our royalty, have often been our business leaders. Movies are made about charismatic CEOs, books are written about our zany billionaires, and millions of dollars are paid to those among us who are deemed to have a true genius for business.

And you can name them: Carnegie. Vanderbilt. Melon. Names as resonant now as they were a hundred years ago. Just as Gates, Jobs, and Buffet will stay in our collective mythology a century from now.

And just as with royalty, just wearing a crown doesn't mean history will regard you favorably.

Those who fail to wear the mantel humbly, or who abuse their power, are just as contemptible as any despot.

So now, as you are equipped to enter the world as a business person, remember the weight of your responsibilities. Whether you use the degree you earned here to head up an eco-friendly hardware store in your hometown, or to snag a spot in the C-suite with a Fortune 500 company, you have a duty to uphold the values and standards of the greatest free enterprise tradition on the planet.

What are those duties and values? Well, you learned a lot of them from the people sitting around you. You learned from your siblings that you can't just take what you want – or you'll get whacked. You learned from your parents the importance of giving everything you've got toward your goals. Your spouse has been patiently teaching you to be fair, to chip in, to never say, "That's not my job," and expect someone else to pick up your slack. Okay, maybe your spouse isn't that patient. But they are teaching you! And you, you're teaching your children that if they have nothing nice to say, well, then they should say nothing at all.

These lessons you've learned about being a responsible member of your family and your community are the same lessons we hope you will practice in your business career.

Now, I know: Some think these rules of good behavior don't apply in the business world. Often, when we talk business, people say things like "getting ahead," "winning the rat race," and "increasing the bottom line."

Aside from never having understood why anyone would voluntarily compare themselves to rats, I don't think these goals are, in and of themselves, bad. After all, business *is* about profit. It *is* about growth, and improvement. It *is*, hopefully, about providing for you and your employees so you can all live comfortable lives.

But I'm happy to tell you that increasingly, you can pursue your bottom line while comporting yourself in a manner your mother would be proud of. That you can be savvy in business but devout to the set of ideals you hold dear. That you can do the *right* thing, even as you are pursuing the *profitable* thing. That your question is not only "Can I," but "Should I."

The right thing means being a good global citizen even as you are being a good business executive. Countless businesses are embracing the philosophy of good citizenship, and they are reaping the rewards. This isn't exactly a new idea, but it is one that is gaining traction. For those of you who are employees of Citizens Bank, isn't the current campaign that says, "Good banking is good citizenship" an example of this new trend?

Another great example is a company called TOMS Shoes. In 2006, Blake Mycoskie (Mi – COS – key) visited Argentina, where he noticed that many children went without shoes – and that these children not only were denied admission to school, but also could contract serious and debilitating diseases from walking barefoot. He decided to find a way to provide these children with shoes, but to do so through the for-profit vehicle of TOMS shoes. TOMS started off marketing the traditional Argentine peasant shoes called alpargatas (al- par – GOT – ahs), and now has a wide variety of styles for men, women and children to choose from. The company has had extraordinary success marketing these fairly high-priced shoes (which I have to say, are not at all my style) to customers, all on the promise that it will deliver a pair of shoes to a child in need for every purchase made.

That's right: one pair of free shoes given to someone in need for every one pair purchased. How successful is that model? Well, in 2009, just a few years after it began, Toms reportedly earned \$5 million in profits.

Take another interesting example, from a company that's certainly more buttoned-up than TOMS : In 1990, Canon started the first ink cartridge recycling program in the United States. Under the program, Canon provides free packaging materials and free shipping for anyone who wants to mail back empty print cartridges. More than twenty years later, the program is still going strong. Canon has reaped the rewards, by extracting and reusing any valuable metals or components of the returned cartridges. But it has also diverted hundreds of thousands of tons of refuse from our landfills. It has done the right thing, while doing the profitable thing.

And finally, I recently learned about the concept of carrot-mobbing – kind of a specialized version of the flash mob. The carrot mob is not, as I first suspected, a group of angry, anarchist redheads. Instead, carrot mobbing is a positive thing for a business: it's the practice of supporting a business to thank it for being socially responsible. It is, in other words, using a carrot, and not a stick, to encourage good business practices. What sorts of things do people carrot-mob for? Well, in Washington DC, restaurant patrons recently descended on a local chain called Teaism because the chain provides paid sick leave to its employees – which is not required under DC law. The carrot-mobbers showed up to thank the business with their pocketbooks – and the line of lunch customers stretched around the block for hours.

Frankly, I am not surprised to learn that Americans value some things more than they value a great bargain; that they are willing to support a company that supports its employees, or to go out of their way to lessen their impact on the environment.

After all, Calvin Coolidge not only said, "The business of America is business," he also said, "The chief ideal of the American people is idealism."

One of the amazing things about the era we live in is that, through the internet, people have access to both the information and the means to vote with their wallets: they are truly empowered through their purchasing power. And as consumers are able to act on their ideals, so too are the business leaders that are furnishing them with products and services.

This is how Seventh Generation is so successful selling eco-friendly household products, and how Lulu Lemon Athletica has a large and loyal base of patrons that agree with its free-market principles. These businesses tapped into success by identifying their ideals, and then living up to those ideals. By making the world a better place, even as they made profits.

So I challenge you, 2012 graduates, to remember that, as newly-minted business leaders, you occupy a glorious place in American culture.

Know how you can tell just how important you are? Because every politician in America is busy talking about how they are going to enact policies to help you and your business thrive. Listen to the political ads, the debates and the speeches, and you will hear that *you* are the job creators, the drivers of our economy, the big thinkers. You are the inhabitants of both Main Street and Wall Street. And you have the power.

But as Franklin Roosevelt said, with great power comes great responsibility.

And on that note, I'd like to introduce our Commencement Speaker, General Scott Harshbarger, who will explore the concept of power and responsibility with a little more depth than I can.

Scott is the former Attorney General of Massachusetts, the former President of the nonprofit Common Cause, and currently serves as senior counsel at the law firm Proskauer Rose, where he is an expert on corporate governance. I am so pleased he has come to speak to us today, and I look forward to hearing his insights.

Allow me to leave you with another quote from Franklin Roosevelt, who said, "Be short, be simple, and be seated."

I probably failed to meet the first two criteria, but the last one is easily accomplished. Before I do seat myself, let me offer you my heartfelt congratulations. Congratulations, class of 2012, and best of luck.