

Shaping Opinion

An Interview with Dr. Kathy Bloomgarden,
Co-Chief Executive Officer, Ruder Finn, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE With more than 25 years of experience in communications for multinational companies, including Novartis, BP, HP, Pfizer, PepsiCo and Microsoft, Dr. Kathy Bloomgarden has developed particular skills in global communications consulting, including a focus on leadership and CEO positioning; global corporate positioning and brand strategy; acquisition/merger and global integration programming; change management; and values and corporate governance. Dr. Bloomgarden is the author of *Trust: The Secret Weapon of Effective Business Leaders*, and holds a B.A. from Brown University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University in Political Science.



Dr. Kathy Bloomgarden

COMPANY BRIEF With more than 65 years of experience, Ruder Finn, Inc. (www.ruderfinn.com) is a leading communications, counseling, and services agency that maintains offices in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington, London, Paris, Jerusalem, Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore. The agency also works with affiliates in major markets throughout the U.S., Europe, and Latin America and services the global and local communications needs of more than 250 corporations and nonprofit organizations. The agency is organized around core competencies in health and wellness, corporate and public trust, technology and innovation, and consumer lifestyles, with its digital practices, RF Relate and RFI Studios, among the largest in the PR industry.

In an industry where services offered can sound similar, how do you show what makes Ruder Finn unique?

Our business focuses on our connections and our commitment to our clients. We are passionate about how we can help our clients. We have very low turnover at senior levels, so we have very deep relationships.

I value my longstanding relationships with journalists, thought leaders, third parties, investors, and policy-makers, and I have been able to develop a real bridge by knowing what they need.

We're all working in environments that are constantly changing. Our teams have the right

connections and can move quickly to deliver. We work hard at being great partners who are consistently thinking ahead and discovering how we can contribute excellent communication results.

Would you still classify Ruder Finn as a public relations firm or is that an outdated concept?

Public relations has become a lot more important than it was in former days. When I first started in this business, PR was nice to have but not necessarily essential. The higher in the corporate hierarchy, the less people felt PR was critical – that has changed dramatically.

As companies become more global and have 100,000 employees or more, public relations, both internal and external, has become increasingly important. And public relations today is not just picking up the phone and calling a journalist or writing a press release and sending it out – it's about shaping opinion. We're Tweeting and using Facebook. Our job is to engage people, to shape opinion, form communities, have a dialogue, and bring people together.

Ruder Finn is well known for representing large, household-name companies. Do you work with small growth companies as well?

Companies large and small need to differentiate themselves, have a voice on pressing issues, and showcase the innovation they bring to their customers. We bring our expertise to bear for companies of all sizes.

Many large companies suggest that, as you grow to a certain size and scale, it's more challenging to maintain innovation as part of the culture. Is that true?

Innovation has been a defining factor for us since the days we began as one of the first PR firms in the world. Helping companies of all sizes express creativity and innovation is something we do very well. We particularly work with companies that are strategically changing their business model or adapting to dynamic markets.

We also focus on changing mindsets and behaviors to adapt to new ways of doing business, something that has been very important in the current economic climate.

In addition, we are very global, with almost half of our work in the global arena.

Do you find that innovation is stronger

overseas? Is there merit to the concern that the U.S. is losing its edge in this regard?

There is always a cycle but, if you watch carefully, you will see that the U.S. is beginning to innovate extremely well in several sectors. The number of patents filed each year in the U.S. remains strong and competitive. We need to continue to invest in advanced technologies to sustain and fortify our innovative power.

We can, of course, do better. The environment that Mayor Bloomberg has established in New York City, and that Kathy Wylde is fostering with the Partnership for New York City, has ensured that we remain focused on nurturing the innovation and opportunities needed to be highly competitive.

Geographically, where will significant growth come for Ruder Finn?

Our biggest growth is in Asia, because we went into China very early and have a very large footprint there, as well as a deep understanding of the Chinese market.

There are also strategic points of focus for Ruder Finn, for which we are well known on a global scale. Those include Corporate, which encompasses areas such as corporate reputation and branding, CEO positioning, issues management, M&A, internal communications, and story development around innovation; Health & Wellness, which is linked to new patient involvement in their health, a different role for medical professionals and governments, changing health care business models, and the use of technologies such as mobile phones for encouraging better health, disease prevention, and healthy eating; Consumer Lifestyles, forming communities around brands, where social media channels play an important role; and Technology and Innovation, which is embedded in almost every part of our lives today, from phones, as the most important social tool, to tablets, iBooks, iPods, and iPads. Technology defines our way of life in every part of the world.

How critical is it for you and the company to be engaged in the community?

Corporate responsibility is essential. People want to work at a company that contributes to the community.

We were one of the first agencies to have a full-time ethics officer, and we also started the first chair in Corporate Social Responsibility in China, at Tsinghua University.

It's important for everyone globally. ●