

# A Trusted Advisor

An Interview with Robert L. Dilenschneider, Founder and Principal, The Dilenschneider Group, Inc.

**EDITORS' NOTE** Robert Dilenschneider formed The Dilenschneider Group in 1991. Prior to founding his own firm, he served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Hill and Knowlton from 1986 to 1991, tripling that firm's revenues to nearly \$200 million and delivering more than \$30 million in profit. He was with that organization for nearly 25 years after starting his career in public relations in 1967 in New York. Dilenschneider serves as a Trustee of the Institute of International Education, and is a member of the North American Advisory Board of The Michael Smurfit School of University College Dublin. He serves as a judge for The Olin Award, a program of the Olin School of Business at Washington University in St. Louis. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Economic Clubs of New York and Chicago and has also served on numerous corporate boards. A former member of the Board of Governors of the American Red Cross, Dilenschneider has served on the advisory board of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Board of Governors of the New York Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and The Bretton Woods Committee. He is a former member of the U.S.-Japan Business Council and the Florida Council of 100 and is a Knight of Malta. Dilenschneider has authored 16 books including his two latest, *Nailing It*, which was released in December 2021, and *The Public Relations Handbook*, which was released in February 2022. He received an MA in journalism from The Ohio State University and a BA from the University of Notre Dame. In 2001, he received an honorary Doctorate of Public Service from Muskingum College, and in 2012 he received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of New Haven.



Robert L. Dilenschneider

**Will you highlight the history of The Dilenschneider Group and how the firm has evolved?**

We formed The Dilenschneider Group more than 31 years ago because it was clear that the U.S. and the world were taking a different shape. A new way of doing business had to be established. Those driving business, society and politics would have to communicate on a much different and higher plane to be successful. We focused on developing a team of

20 years of experience who looked ahead and developed different strategies for mergers and acquisitions, marketing, government affairs, and global communications. Our goal was and is to provide a level of counsel, creativity, and exposure to contacts, networks and relationships that can be found nowhere else.

In short, things were changing so much and so fast that we discarded the past and launched into a new era that we revisit every day.

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**What have been the keys to The Dilenschneider Group's strength and industry leadership?**

One of our hallmarks is the ability to look around corners and see what is coming – not just look at what happened and prepare for it, but to lead it. We use contacts around the world at the highest levels of business, the economy and in politics. Most people still go for as much attention

as they can reach. We work with several top executives to reach one or two people to get a result.

**Will you provide an overview of The Dilenschneider Group's capabilities and services?**

Our goal is to offer advice and service in the most cost-effective manner possible as we are unburdened by a heavy cost structure and a large staff. We have special offerings for CEOs, CFOs, and top management generally. We know what moves internal staff, how to reach those decision-makers who are important – generally, not many – outside a company, how to understand and penetrate Washington and state capitols. This will be very important following the midterm elections and the run up to the 2024 Presidential race.

**How has the role of a communications firm changed and what do you see as the keys to being effective in the industry today?**

Communications is now an integral part of top management. It must be embraced, so communicators need to know the company and their client from A to Z, understand the external factors and pressures that are important, and set specific goals that relate to the bottom line.

**What advice do you offer to young people interested in a career in communications?**

Understand what is happening in the world, constantly read what other more seasoned experts say, know the culture of your organization, and build and feed your own network.

**You have spent your career in the communications industry. What has made the work so special for you?**

I have been able to participate in the events that have shaped life and society. Additionally, I have been able to meet and work with some of the smartest people out there – and we are just getting started.

**What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?**

Let people do what they do best; do not ask them to do what they cannot do – those are keys. My approach is to let people do all they can, and assist if needed.

**Did you always know that you had the entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own company?**

In the beginning, I was terrified, but I soon learned that I could bring a quality of advice and help that people needed and wanted. ●

**FIRM BRIEF** Headquartered in New York and Chicago, with offices in Miami, The Dilenschneider Group ([dilenschneider.com](http://dilenschneider.com)) provides a limited and select few access to the finest communications professionals in the world, with experience in fields ranging from mergers and acquisitions and crisis communications to marketing, government affairs and international media.