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PR Pros Weigh in on Chevron's '60 Minutes' Offensive

Oil Giant Hired Former CNN Reporter to Rebut Report on \$27 Billion Lawsuit

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Like any smart company facing the threat of having to pay out the most costly environmental lawsuit in history -- \$27 billion -- and contending with a "60 Minutes" report on the case that won't aid its argument in any way, Chevron has gone on a public-relations offensive. But the twist in its strategy is that [it enlisted](#) a former CNN reporter to rebut the news magazine's report by creating a near identical report that lays out the oil giant's side of the story.



Chevron hired former CNN reporter Gene Randall to present a report that laid out the oil giant's side of the story.

Chevron is waiting for an Ecuadorian judge to decide if it will have to pay that enormous amount in damages for allegedly contaminating the Amazon rainforest. It hired Gene Randall to put together [the report](#), which was posted in April, a few weeks before CBS ran [the "60 Minutes" report](#) May 3.

The move by Chevron is a strong indicator of what brands fighting for market share in a struggling economy and a highly judgmental consumer marketplace will resort to in order to stave off bad press. And it may also shed light on what the future path of journalism could look like. Ad Age asked a number of PR professionals for their thoughts on what Mr. Randall's report signifies for the future of journalism and corporate communications.

Eric Dezenhall, CEO and co-founder of Dezenhall Resources: "The future of journalism will lie in part in

blatantly agenda-driven communications. Many of my corporate clients believe that conventional journalists have surrendered entirely to a loose affiliation of plaintiffs lawyers, self-styled whistleblowers, issue-driven NGOs and short-sellers. Whereas these companies would never have thought about producing their own journalism a few short years ago, the stakes have gotten higher, so they're willing to consider options that would have been considered subversive."

Mark Hass, CEO of MH Group Communications: "The meltdown of traditional media and the demise of all-powerful news organizations has enlarged that opportunity. I'd hate to live in a world without '60 Minutes'-type reporting, but it's a better and more interesting world when companies, and even lone bloggers, behave more like journalists when telling their stories. It may ... even provide jobs for all those reporters watching their newsroom spots disappear."

Mike Lawrence, chief reputation officer at Omnicom Group's Cone: "We have done this for multiple clients using former national and local print and broadcast journalists. However, we do not sign off with 'This is John Doe reporting,' because that could leave the impression it was put together by a (supposedly) independent news outlet."

Tony Telloni, managing director, New York, for WPP's Burson Marsteller: "I think this is a logical progression and outgrowth from what we've seen on the digital and social media side. The opportunity for corporations and agencies to leverage credible journalists and do this on a more proactive or in this case, reactive basis makes great sense. I'm sure we'll see more and more of this given the existing realities impacting the media industry."

Nick Ragone, associate director of Omnicom Group's Ketchum, New York: "This type of advocacy campaign isn't entirely new. The only difference is that social-media tools like YouTube now provide much greater reach and amplification for companies doing this type of advocacy, and so we'll probably see more of it. It gives companies a chance to circumvent the traditional media and speak directly to their stakeholders"

What do you think of Chevron's PR play?

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