

 **The Holmes Report**
News and Intelligence for Public Relations Professionals

**JOELE FRANK, WILKINSON
BRIMMER KATCHER**

*Financial, corporate and crisis
communications*

NEW YORK

LAST year was another strong one for Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher, our 2011 Financial Agency of the Year, most obviously in terms of the mergers and acquisitions arena that often defines success in the rarified level at which JFWBK operates. The firm was number one in mergermarket's ranking by value of deals working (handling 87 deals worth a combined \$170 billion) and climbed to number two in terms of volume (it actually ranked number one in Corporate Control Alert's similar league table), helping to keep companies such as **Airgas, Clorox, Family Dollar, Lionsgate, Potash** and **Tenet** independent in the face of hostile bids.

The firm was equally successful defending companies against professional shareholder activist campaigns, in part by turning crisis into opportunity and driving home messages that reinforce the company's long-term strategic goals. The firm was retained to defend **Oshkosh** against Carl Icahn, who disclosed a 9.5 percent ownership stake and nominated six candidates to the 13-member board of directors while publicly supporting a merger between Oshkosh and competitor Navistar. Oshkosh shareholders elected all 13 of the Company's director nominees at the 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders. JFWBK also helped **Illinois Tool Works** with communications strategy after Relational Investors took a stake, turning what could have been a confrontational relationship into a more cooperative agreement.

The firm's expertise also includes proxy fights, spin-offs, IPOs and other changes of control; a wide variety of crisis communications, including bankruptcy and restructuring, litigation, product liability, regulatory investigations and sanctions, management succession, earnings surprises and labor strife; and a growing public affairs and issues

management business, developing campaigns that help clients address policy issues on state and federal levels. And in 2011, it worked on a number of high-profile spin-offs, including ITT's separation into three independent, publicly traded companies and L-3's spin-off of Engility, part its government services business segment.

But the firm works with more than 200 different clients, including many that initially retained JFWBK for special situations and have continued the relationship on long-term retainers for public relations and investor relations, impressed by the firm's straightforward, independent, strategic advice; its deep relationships with Wall Street opinion makers, the financial press, and the arbitrage community; and its deep bench of talent.

The latter was expanded in 2011 with the addition of **Michael Freitag**, formerly with rival Kekst, as a partner. He joins a team that includes **Joele Frank** herself (a veteran of 300-plus "special situation" assignments); name partners **Andrew Brimmer**, and **Daniel Katcher**; and partners **Steve Frankel**, **Barrett Golden**, and **Matthew Sherman**, who lead an experienced team of 60 that includes more than a dozen managing directors and directors.

The firm "was an invaluable advisor leading up to and during our initial public offering at the end of 2011," says Kevin Clark, senior vice president and chief financial officer at Delphi. "The team was able to distill complex legal and financial information into simple themes to help articulate Delphi's business imperatives for our many audiences." Adds Jenny Schiavone, global head of communications for ITT: "Throughout a year-long spin-off process, the Joele Frank team provided sophisticated strategic counsel, savvy PR advice, straightforward leadership and seamless execution. The team was highly experienced and professional, and collaborated well with our internal team, as well as our external advisors."

From its office in New York, the firm works on many international projects, cooperating with select local firms. —PH