



# Member Profile

## An Interview With: Susan Tolson

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By: Tapkannia Koeun



**Susan Tolson**, Director, Groupe Lagardère, Outfront Media, WorldLine E-Payment Services, and Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc.; Member, WCD France

**Q1: As director of Groupe Lagardère, how are the current state of events impacting content creation and promotion?**

*As you well know, with social distancing, all film and television entertainment studios and venue promotion and management companies have pushed the pause button on the ability to affect new productions and events and Lagardère is no exception.*

*Fortunately, content and promotion creation is not a significant portion of their economics.*

**Q2: You are on the board of Outfront Media. Are out-of-home media practices necessary to reach consumers in the digital age?**

*Absolutely. People will always need to commute to work each day whether it be via cars, buses, or subways, and billboards have shown to be very efficacious to advertisers.*

*In addition, the out of home industry has been digitizing their static boards over the last 20 years. Digitalization is a positive development for the outdoor industry as they can place multiple advertisers on a single board versus just one on a static board. Also, costs can be lowered as the content can be created and changed remotely obviating the need for a team to go to the board site to change out the vinyl advertising content.*

**Q3: What are your best practices for leading during a crisis?**

*As Albert Einstein said, “In the midst of a crisis, lies great opportunity”. The most important thing in a crisis is to stay calm and think clearly. Strong leaders should develop an action plan that is realistic, manage the company’s financial flexibility, and scenario plan for a worse case.*

*Leaders need to communicate to their employees, Board, and all stakeholders frequently, appropriately and transparently.*

**Q4: Have you seen a spike in the output for game publishing—since you are on the board of Take Two Interactive Software—reflecting stay-at-home guidelines?**

*Gaming releases are driven by the product development cycle, which can take anywhere from 6-months to several years given the nature of the game. Therefore, whatever games have been released during this quarantine period were already in the works.*

*Should this quarantine last longer than expected, I would expect game output to be delayed as remote working for the developers can slow the process down.*

*The gaming industry has, however, seen a significant increase in game sales and play during this quarantine period, which has provided some nice resilience for the video game companies’ business.*

**Q5: You have a very diverse list of board directorships ranging from media, video game software, to digital payment services. Why have you chosen to be on the boards of such diverse industries?**

*I was an analyst and portfolio manager for over 25 years and have always been intellectually curious about learning new industries.*

*Although my longest industry coverage is the media industry, which logically led me to joining the Lagardère and Outfront Media boards, I have covered the communication towers, paper and forest products, retail, and healthcare industries as well.*

*When the opportunities arose for me to join the Take-Two Interactive and the WorldLine E-Payment Services boards, I was very excited to do a deep dive into those growth industries and offer my financial and buy-side analytical expertise.*

*These two skills have enabled me to be both the Audit Chair of Take-Two and a member of the Nomination and Governance Committee and Audit Committee of WorldLine.*

**Q6: In 2011, French lawmakers passed a bill requiring that public boards appoint female directorship by 40% within six years. In your opinion, does this quota benefit or hinder the level of female directorship?**

*Whether one agrees in quotas or not, I believe that the bill has enhanced the*

*quality of the discussion on the boards on which I am a member.*

*Considering that women make 50% of global consumer decisions, it's obvious to me that having female representation on a board will help to produce good strategic thinking and a broader discussion of issues that may not have been raised.*

**Q7: Can you share notable experiences or lessons learned from your time at the U.S. Ambassador to France residence?**

*The U.S. Ambassador to France spouse has a high profile role that carries a tremendous amount of weight in the country. I retired from being an investment manager to becoming the manager of a 3-star restaurant, mini-conference center, and residence where 70,000 people visited events on an annual basis.*

*In addition to those duties, the spouse has myriad opportunities to make a mark to further the bilateral relationship. That said, given the limited resources and time, I had to curate my objectives and projects tightly.*

*I did so by trying to be as efficient as possible, coordinating with the Embassy divisions, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and public entities to realize those projects. It took much creativity and finesse and I was very happy with the ultimate results.*

**Q8: What did you do in preparation to serve on boards?**

*In terms of on-boarding, I want to understand industry trends, what has happened historically as well as the current CEO's vision for the company and how the financial community views the company.*

*I meet separately with each member of the Executive team, review 5 years worth of financial reports, read past Governance, Audit, Risk, and Compensation Committee Minutes and Board minutes, and read analyst and industry reports.*

**Q9: Outside of the office, how do you enjoy your spare time?**

*I like to spend time with my family and friends, exercise, cook, read, do the New York Times Crossword Puzzle, play Words with Friends, and watch television and movies. Currently, I am favoring comedies to provide some levity during this quarantine period.*

**Q10: What are your biggest takeaways since joining WCD?**

*WCD has an enormous amount of resources of which one can take advantage. The seminars and conferences are very topical and professionally organized and the quality of the membership is unmatched.*