



VisitTheUSA.com

**Brand USA**

# IPW Press Kit: Bios & Headshots





# Chris Thompson

President & Chief Executive Officer

Chris Thompson is president and CEO of Brand USA, the nation's public-private partnership dedicated to increasing international visitation to the United States through marketing and promotional efforts. In this role, Chris is responsible for accelerating the organization's efforts to build and execute effective marketing strategies to increase U.S. travel exports, create jobs, strengthen the economy, and help enhance the image of the United States with people all over the world. Under Chris' leadership, Brand USA has nearly tripled its partnership network and more than doubled its partner contributions and program offerings.

Chris has more than 30 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry. Prior to joining Brand USA in November 2012, Chris was president and CEO of VISIT FLORIDA. Under his leadership, Florida realized record growth in international visitation.

He began his tourism career with the former Florida Department of Commerce's Division of Tourism in April 1983, and later became bureau chief for domestic tourism in April 1986. In November 1988, Chris went on to join the Leon County (Florida) Tourist Development Council as the organization's first executive director, and in April 1991, he took leadership of the Tallahassee (Florida) Area Convention and Visitors Bureau as president and CEO.

In August 1995, Chris founded MarketServe, Inc., a professional management, marketing and planning services company based in Tallahassee, Florida. Two years later, he joined VISIT FLORIDA as senior vice-president, partner development. He was promoted to chief operating officer in May 2003 and named president and CEO in May 2009.

# Chris Thompson

President & Chief Executive Officer

Throughout his career, Chris has been honored with a number of industry awards and recognized for numerous accomplishments, including being named the first recipient of Skål International's USA National Tourism Leadership Award in 2018 in recognition of his "very meaningful contribution to the growth and success of tourism in the United States." In 2015, Chris received the National Tour Association's (NTA) Pioneer Award for his accomplishments in producing significant changes in the travel industry. He was named one of the "Top Twenty-Five Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales and Marketing" by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International in both 2009 and 2013.

Chris is currently on the board of Destinations International, where he is on the organization's Executive and Global Leadership committees. He is also a member of the Advisory Board for the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute, an entity within the Department of Tourism, Recreation, and Sport Management at the University of Florida.

A Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) since May 2010, Chris has also been a member of and served on the leadership boards of numerous other national, regional, state, and local trade associations and organizations. The list includes the U.S. Travel Association; U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce); Travel and Tourism Advisory Council (to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Miami branch); Association of Travel Marketing Executives; Southeast Tourism Society; and Skål. Additionally, Chris is a trustee and a member of the Executive Committee for the Federal City Council, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the improvement of the District of Columbia. Chris earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from the University of Florida in 1980. He and his wife, Susan, have two grown sons, Christopher and James.



# Thomas Garzilli

Chief Marketing Officer

Thomas Garzilli is the chief marketing officer for Brand USA, the nation's destination marketing organization. In this role, Tom is responsible for leading the development of Brand USA's strategic marketing plan, and all efforts to ensure Brand USA achieves year-over-year revenue, visitation, and economic impact targets.

Brand USA has raised more than \$750 million in contributions from more than 900 partners and has developed many successful and award-winning marketing programs including, most notably, Brand USA's Many Voices/Multi-Screen Strategy and other innovative travel trade initiatives. These initiatives include the creation and distribution of three giant-screen documentary films ("National Parks Adventure," "America's Musical Journey," and "Into America's Wild"), the launch of GoUSA TV, a first-of-its kind streaming channel, and "Brand USA Travel Week," a unique travel trade buyer/seller experience.

Tom's experience in the travel industry spans five decades. Before joining Brand USA in 2013, he was managing partner of Custom Marketing Group (CMG), an award-winning destination marketing and custom publishing company he co-founded in 1992. Prior to CMG, Tom spent 15 years in his family's wholesale travel business.

Tom earned his bachelor of business administration degree from Pace University, Lubin School of Business, and he and his wife, Natalie, have three children.



## Donald F. Richardson, CPA

Chief Financial Officer, Chief Diversity  
and Inclusion Officer

Donald Richardson is the chief financial, and diversity and inclusion officer for Brand USA, the nation's public-private partnership dedicated to increasing international visitation to the United States through marketing and promotional efforts. As chief financial officer, Don is responsible for developing and leading the financial strategy for the organization in a way that is responsive to Brand USA's key stakeholders, ensures compliance with policies and operating controls, and enables the organization to make strategic decisions and accurately measure performance and return on investment of its core initiatives. As chief diversity and inclusion officer, Don is responsible for optimizing organizational culture as well as aligning Brand USA's diversity and inclusion goals with business outcomes and key stakeholders, such as customers and employees. Through data-based diversity and inclusion strategies, he ensures an integrated approach of DEI principles and actions that are responsive to and reflective of Brand USA's global footprint.

With more than 30 years of professional experience in accounting, financial management, automated systems and information technology trends, Don has demonstrated technical, management, and programmatic capabilities in all facets of business process engineering, organizational design, strategic planning, and systems implementations. Throughout Don's career, he has provided clients with superior leadership during critical growth and transition phases, including hiring professional and technical staff, developing strategic plans, implementing effective management information systems, and directing complex projects.

# Donald F. Richardson, CPA

Chief Financial Officer, Chief Diversity  
and Inclusion Officer

Before joining Brand USA in May 2013, Don was senior principal and managing director for an independent consulting firm and led the Business Systems Practice for Bazilio Cobb Associates from 2011 to 2013. A former partner with KPMG, Don was responsible for spearheading service delivery to several non-Department of Defense (DoD) U.S. government agencies, including the Executive Office of the President, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, and the Department of Agriculture. Following the spinoff of KPMG to BearingPoint, a management and technology-consulting firm, Don served as managing director and partner. In his capacity with both organizations, he provided IT and operational services to a variety of governmental clients and was responsible for market development, service delivery and profit/loss management.

He currently serves on the boards of the Shiloh Baptist Church and is the board treasurer for the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA). He has also served as a director on the DC Board of Accountancy (vice chair), Wolf Trap Associates (treasurer), Studio Theatre, and the Whitman-Walker Clinic.

A certified public accountant (CPA), Don earned his bachelor of arts degree in accounting from Appalachian State University.



# Aaron Wodin-Schwartz

Senior Vice President, Public Affairs

Aaron Wodin-Schwartz is senior vice president, public affairs for Brand USA, the nation's public-private partnership dedicated to increasing international visitation to the United States through marketing and promotional efforts. In this role, Aaron develops, executes, and leads outreach efforts to key stakeholders to promote and advance Brand USA's mission and raise visibility worldwide for the organization, build community engagement, and respond to requests from these stakeholders regarding the organization's progress toward established goals and objectives. Aaron is also responsible for working with federal partners and key industry groups to ensure productive implementation of the Travel Promotion Act, communicate U.S. travel policies, and develop collaborative opportunities to promote inbound travel to the United States.

Aaron joined Brand USA in November 2011, serving as deputy director of strategic outreach until October 2012, and subsequently director, public policy from October 2012 until his promotion to vice president, public policy in January 2017. During his tenure with Brand USA, Aaron has successfully established a variety of programs with federal partners that highlight unique aspects of the United States, such as our culinary experiences and federal lands and waters. He's also deployed a unified promotional campaign through U.S. embassies, consulates and Visit USA committees around the world. For these accomplishments and more, Aaron was inducted into the Destination Marketing Association International "30 Under 30" Class of 2014.

# Aaron Wodin-Schwartz

Senior Vice President, Public Affairs

Aaron brings important public policy and government experience to the Brand USA team. From 2009 to 2011, as a presidential management fellow at the Department of Commerce, Aaron served as policy advisor to the deputy assistant secretary for services industries where, among other things, he worked on implementation of the Travel Promotion Act. While at the Department of Commerce, Aaron helped lead key departmental initiatives including improvement of services trade statistics, development of strategies to double services industries exports, and the International Trade Administration's response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Aaron has gained strong Latin American experience throughout the course of his career, including a rotation at the State Department where he worked on the Brazil desk, covering U.S.-Brazil efforts on environment, science, technology, and health; economic cooperation; social inclusion; and consular affairs. Prior to Aaron's government service, he was the program assistant for the Latin American and Hemispheric Studies Program at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. He speaks fluent Spanish and is conversant in French and Portuguese.

Aaron plays in several recreational soccer leagues and follows Boston sports. He enjoys outdoor recreation such as mountain biking and skiing. He holds a master of arts degree in Latin American and Hemispheric Studies from The George Washington University and a bachelor of arts degree in political science from the University of Massachusetts.



# Karyn Gruenberg

Senior Vice President,  
Partner Marketing & Strategic Alliances

Karyn Gruenberg is senior vice president, partner marketing & strategic alliances at Brand USA, the public-private partnership whose mission is to increase incremental international visitation, spend and market share in order to fuel the nation's economy and enhance the image of the U.S. Worldwide.

In this position, Karyn is responsible for leading partner marketing efforts, as well as building global strategic alliances to leverage the combined resources and expertise of the industry. Her leadership includes development and oversight of all partner-driven marketing programs and key global media alliances, that add and create value for partners, amplify our partners' international reach, and drive inbound visitor travel and tourism dollars to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five territories. In addition, Karyn leads the organization's efforts to generate \$100 million in annual contributions from organizations within and beyond the travel industry. An integral part of Karyn's leadership includes working with the marketing teams and agencies in strategic development of consumer and global marketing campaigns, while engaging the travel trade as well as broadcast, online, and other media advertising partners to enhance the message and reach audiences worldwide.

Among her many accomplishments at Brand USA, Karyn established the core partner program strategy that today includes more than 100 programs, 200 opportunities and key media partnerships with top-tier outlets such as BBC, National Geographic, Bloomberg, Euro News, and Alibaba, among others. These programs have helped earn Brand USA a strong partner program retention rating of more than 90% and maximize partner contributions.

# Karyn Gruenberg

Senior Vice President,  
Partner Marketing & Strategic Alliances

During the past 25 years, Karyn has been recognized globally in creating value-driven marketing strategies that generate growth and drive business results. Over the course of Karyn's career, she has built a strong track record of success across a range of disciplines from integrated marketing, communications, branding and advertising to strategic planning and execution, sponsorship, and partnership development.

Prior to joining Brand USA, Karyn led the marketing effort for Meet Minneapolis, the premier tourism and convention marketing organization for the greater Minneapolis, Minnesota region. As part of the leadership team, she was instrumental in securing major sponsorships for the city, as well as directing all advertising, public relations, digital development, and creative services to market the city. In addition, Karyn spearheaded the highly acclaimed rebranding project for Minneapolis and Saint Paul and played a critical role in helping the city win the bid to host the 2008 Republican National Convention.

Prior to Meet Minneapolis, Karyn directed all marketing and promotions for Target Center, one of the top five highest revenue-producing arenas in North America. Simultaneously, Karyn held the role for the 1998 World Figure Skating Championships as its executive director. An award-winning marketer, Karyn has earned honors from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and was named one of the top 25 Women Industry Leaders in the Twin Cities. She earned her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Minnesota and pursued a master's degree in business communications at the University of Saint Thomas, Minnesota.



# Jackie Ennis

Vice President, Global Markets

Jackie joined Brand USA in August of 2018 as senior director, global trade development after working as a consultant with the organization's global trade team and became instrumental in strategic development of the organization's trade initiatives.

Prior to Brand USA, Jackie was responsible for the international marketing strategy for the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. She was also the former executive director for Discover New England, where she developed the successful business-to-business international marketplace which is considered one of the most valuable business opportunities for the New England hospitality industry in marketing the region to international travelers. Her other previous positions include principal of Ennis Marketing; director and international marketing manager for Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing; and product manager for Saga Holidays.

An avid traveler, Jackie has lived in three countries as has visited 29 countries, 28 states, and the District of Columbia. She loves tennis and is semi-fluent in Spanish. She is married and has two children.

Jackie received her bachelor's degree in international relations and Spanish from the University of Warwick, England.