



Mediaite's Most Influential in News Media 2023

Mediaite Staff | Dec 20th, 2023, 10:05 am

14016 comments



It's that time of year again — when members of the media suspend themselves on tenterhooks at the edge of their seats on pins and needles waiting anxiously to see where (and IF) they placed on Mediaite's Most Influential List for 2023. Who's up, who's down, who's in and who's out? Call your publicist! The moment has arrived!

This year was marked by shocking and seismic shifts in the news media, as Goliaths of varying sizes were felled and massive fortunes rose and fell.

The most spectacular media newsquake had to be the *Fox News v. Dominion Voting Systems* defamation trial, which played out over the first four months of the year as excruciating bombshell after excruciating bombshell about the inner workings of Fox News dropped on what must have seemed like a daily basis for beleaguered Fox execs.

After all of those damaging revelations came out, news broke that the parties reached a whopping \$787.5 million settlement on the very first day of the trial. The company is still facing a separate \$2.7 billion lawsuit from Smartmatic.

Days after the settlement, another shock hit: the network's highest-rated host **Tucker Carlson** — also the subject of many revelations from the lawsuit — was ousted from Fox News. Fox ended up with **Jesse Watters** in Carlson's old slot, and Carlson wound up with a show on Twitter — which, before long, was no longer Twitter.

That's because another flaming behemoth — billionaire **Elon Musk** — spewed his own series of monumental ash clouds and magma into the mediasphere. Musk began the year having just achieved the distinction of becoming the first person in history to lose \$200 billion in net worth.

In between, Musk presided over a consistent drip of technical glitches, completely upended the platform's verification system, changed its name to "X" — and capped off a raft of other controversies by spending the year engaging with conspiracy theorists that resulted in Musk agreeing with a guy whose anti-Semitic rant sought to fulfill a dare that someone argue "Hitler was right" to a Jewish user's face. When advertisers fled, he told them "Go fuck yourself." All the while, all eyes were on Musk.

Over at CNN, the year began with **Chris Licht** making moves in his quest to remake the network and reverse its ratings woes and reputation as the anti-Trump network. Then came the shocking firing of longtime star **Don Lemon**, one of a series of controversies that roiled CNN.

The Licht-orchestrated town hall with former President Donald Trump — moderated by **Kaitlan Collins** — was a focal point of widespread criticism despite eliciting a raft of newsworthy revelations. But a brutal profile in *The Atlantic* was a key turning point that preceded Licht's own shocking firing.

2023 was also a big year for Trump-related media, especially resistance media. Beginning in March, Trump was indicted four times on 91 felony counts, was found liable for the sexual abuse of E. Jean Carroll, and lost a fraud case against his company — which is all over but the judgment amount. The firehose of legal news provided hundreds of hours and millions of words of commentary and analysis.

And closely intertwined with the legal news was the 2024 presidential campaign, which began as a lopsided contest with Gov. **Ron DeSantis** (R-FL) closing the gap as President **Joe Biden** led Trump in the polls. But the indictments only increased Trump's support among Republicans, and by years end had given him a massive national lead on the GOP field and a threatening lead over Biden in many polls.

But the news story of the year hit like a ton of bricks on October 7 when Hamas launched a brutal terrorist assault on Israel that has sparked a furious and deadly response. War correspondents like Fox's **Trey Yingst**, CNN's **Clarissa Ward**, and NBC's **Richard Engel** distinguished themselves with courageous journalism from the Israel-Hamas war zone, as well as the roiling Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Today, Mediate recognizes the 75 biggest movers and shakers in media this year. There are a variety of factors that we take into account when evaluating someone's position on the list. A few of the metrics are tangible, like TV ratings, social media followings, and engagement. Those are all easily measurable.

Some criteria for the list are harder to define — like the adage goes, we know it when we see it. Is there insider buzz surrounding a particular media figure? Do they churn out scoops and score big interviews? Are they the talk of their rivals? Are they being courted by other major outlets? For good or ill, do they influence other journalists' coverage?

With that in mind, the writers and editors of Mediaite are proud to present our 2023 selections for the Most Influential in News Media.

This list was written by Joe DePaolo, Isaac Schorr, Colby Hall, Caleb Howe, Sarah Rumpf, Tommy Christopher, Jamie Frevele, Jennifer Bowers Bahney, Aidan McLaughlin, Ken Meyer, Charlie Nash, Alex Griffing, Ahmad Austin, David Gilmour, and Michael Luciano.

69. Bryan Freedman



AP Photos

You may have never heard of Bryan Freedman, the high-powered entertainment lawyer. But he's one of the most powerful — and most feared — people in the media industry. If you're a big-name media personality involuntarily exiting your employment (there were a lot of those this year) Freedman is the guy you call to make sure your defenestration comes with a financially-cushioned landing. Freedman previously negotiated lucrative severance packages for Megyn Kelly from NBC, Chris Harrison from *The Bachelor* franchise, and is still fighting for Chris Cuomo in his separation from CNN. Two of the biggest media stories this year were the ousters of Tucker Carlson from Fox News and Don Lemon from CNN, and while those two cable news hosts don't seem to have a lot in common, they both jumped to sign representation agreements with the pitbull attorney. Carlson's departure was certainly the splashier of the two (at least from what we know from public reporting and various leaks), with Freedman sending a fiery letter right out of the gate to Fox arguing that the non-compete provision in the former top-rated host's contract wasn't enforceable and threatening to sue if the network tried to block him from launching his new show on The Platform Formerly Known as Twitter. Bryan Freedman remains, more than anyone else in the industry, the last phone call any network wants to get.