



## SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT MARKET ASSOCIATION

### CHAIR-ELECT CANDIDACY QUESTIONNAIRE 2023–2024 ELECTION YEAR

# MELANIE WHITE

## CEO, Hellwig Products

### Part 1 – Personal/Professional History

1. Please provide a history of your professional background and education (including professional development). Feel free to attach your résumé and/or bio. Describe the specifics of your current job responsibilities:

#### My Bio:

Melanie Hellwig White is the president of Hellwig Suspension Products and the fourth-generation Hellwig to lead the company. Under Melanie's leadership, the company has boosted sales, developed strong OEM partnerships, increased brand awareness, and implemented a robust digital marketing strategy.

Starting at Hellwig Products in 2005, Melanie gained experience in every area of the company including sales, marketing and customer service, but also enjoys putting on her steel-toed boots and working the factory floor with her team.

A passionate volunteer, Melanie is on the SEMA Board of Directors, was recognized as SEMA Person of the Year in 2018 and has served as the Chair of the Light Truck Accessory Alliance (LTAA, now called Truck and Off-Road Alliance [TORA]), as a select committee member on ETTN (Emerging Trends & Technology Network) and is the current Chair of SEMA Cares.

Attached is my Résumé.

2. Indicate your historic and/or current involvement with automotive industry initiatives specifically, as well as other professional and philanthropic associations, societies, and organizations you have been actively involved in. Please be specific about other boards (if any) on which you have served or are currently serving:

I have been a passionate volunteer for over almost two decades. I currently sit on the SEMA Board of Directors. The position of a board member has been a lot of work, but I have loved it. I love the influence on the industry we can make as board members. I love being surrounded by others who are passionate about our industry and its success. And I especially love the environment for passionate conversation

and solving big problems.

I started as a volunteer for LTAA, now TORA. I fell in love with the industry and the ability to make a bigger impact by taking off our company hats and putting on our industry hats. I continued to volunteer with CBLC, ETTN and SEMA Cares.

Outside of the industry, I have volunteered for our local Little League board and Rocky Hill Triathlon, am Vistage member, part of the San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance, and am president of Exeter Toastmasters.

3. Please highlight specific career accomplishments including, but not limited to, patents received, product innovations, awards and recognitions, publications, marketing or business programs, presentation to business and/or industry symposiums. Share any and all significant or notable accomplishments:

- SEMA Person of the Year in 2018, SEMA Businesswoman of the Year in 2016, SEMA News 35 under 35 in 2014, Fresno's 40 Under 40 in 2011
- Speaker at the SEMA Show for "Family Business" in 2021, for "Women in Business and What Works" in 2021, for ETTN Symposium in 2016
- Spokesperson for Tariffs and Electronic Stability Control
- SEMA Show founding member
- Ford Design award in 2017
- Awarded Platinum Data from SEMA Data
- Craig School of Business Family Business Award in 2018

4. Please mark each of the skill categories where you believe you possess a level of expertise:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Motor Sports/Racing                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distribution/Logistics              | <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Shows/Auctions/Exhibitions          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supply Chain                        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial Planning/Management    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicular/Product Design/Innovation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Resources Management       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Product Management       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business Management/ Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OEM Design/Technology               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sales                            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brand Management         | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Technology                         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advertising              | <input type="checkbox"/> Data Management                             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marketing                | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet Utilization                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify):                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations                    | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crisis Management        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regulatory Compliance               | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative/Lobbying                | _____  |

**Part 2 – Personal/Professional Attributes**

5. What are your specific areas of expertise? What unique skills or perspective do you think you could bring to the leadership of SEMA? What business or life experience do you have that prepares you to help shape the direction of the industry? What industry issues are you particularly passionate about?

My expertise is in manufacturing knowledge. I am aware of the challenges of manufacturing in the United States, and the challenges that affect manufacturers for the automotive industry. I have a strong background in marketing and sales, but I've been living in steel toe boots and have worked the factory line as well. I have a deep understanding of all aspects of manufacturing from sales, marketing, engineering, finance and operations.

I believe my unique skills are my connections in the industry. I feel I could help represent the small to mid-size companies. I am a strategic thinker and am always thinking of opportunities to grow. I am strongly committed to continuous improvement and will challenge the status quo.

My business or life experience includes running a mid-sized company and almost tripling the business since joining the company. I've grown the company, the leadership team, the Hellwig team, culture and have implemented the idea of continuous improvement with lean manufacturing. With all the work, it has also allowed us to be the most profitable we have been in our history. I have responsibility for the financial success for the company. I read and am responsible for the P&L for our company.

Before I joined Hellwig, I managed a French gourmet baker. I was responsible for the

success of that small company; I ran the day-to-day operations and helped grow their wholesale business. I also understand the challenges of running a small company and the limited resources available.

I'm particularly passionate about vehicle technology and legislation. These are two areas that have directly affected our company in the last 75 years and one of the biggest reasons we became SEMA members. We are stronger together and more able to fight new policies that hurt our businesses or can work together to create solutions for new legislation. We were one of the first to work with SEMA with testing for ESC.

6. What would you say is/are your most notable achievement(s) to this point in your career? What are you most proud of?

I am incredibly proud to have been selected as a SEMA Person of the Year. It is such an honor to see my name listed with the past amazing SEMA Person of the Year winners. That has been a true honor.

But what I'm most proud of is how I've positively impacted the revenue and profit for our company, because of how it positively impacts the 50-plus employees and their families who currently work for us. I am incredibly proud of the culture and team we are building to make all of this happen. And I have navigated challenges throughout COVID, which has allowed me the opportunity to sharpen my skills as a leader.

### **Part 3 – Industry Perspective**

7. What do you consider to be the top opportunities or threats facing the specialty parts aftermarket over the next five years? Try to be specific to industry trends. You may comment on advancement of federal regulations and macroeconomic issues (inflation, unemployment, health care, etc.) but only if they are relevant to your perspective on industry issues.

There are three significant areas that are both threats and opportunities.

1. Our influence in Washington, D.C., for legislation and regulation is my most important concern. If we did nothing else well but got this right, it would be the best thing we could do for the industry.
2. SEMA has this significant opportunity to protect our revenue with marketing and branding; we have this great event, the SEMA Show, that we could genuinely use to leverage for the industry health.
3. Vehicle technology is another area of threat and opportunity to our industry. In the last three years, the electrification of vehicles has been significantly growing, and we are seeing more and more changes like this.

My number-one focus is on our influence in Washington, D.C. Our most significant area where I need to gain ground is in Washington, D.C. We have an office in DC where a team

of people do excellent work for the association and the industry. But our industry is being threatened like never before. We have an opportunity to increase our influence in Washington so that our industry doesn't lose its voice or its right to modify. On all fronts, there are threats to our industry with the Oceano Dunes closure, Bonneville Salt Flats, Sacramento's law that doesn't allow you to work on your vehicle at your home within the city limits. There are so many of these different threats coming at our industry that we need to do everything we can to support the DC team. My company just turned 77 years old. We've seen how laws have affected our company over the years. There is a massive opportunity for us to work together to combat and stay ahead of the legislation and regulation.

Legislation and regulation is why SEMA got started. We teamed up together to put up a good fight for our industry. We have a DC office that is building up their team and plan. We are lucky to have just hired a powerhouse in this area who has a solid plan. I am excited to find opportunities to support SEMA Senior Vice President of Public and Government Affairs Karen Bailey-Chapman and the DC team more.

My second focus is on protecting our revenue. Marketing and communications is a big area I see as a significant opportunity. We host one of the biggest trade shows in North America and have a huge brand presence during the week of the SEMA Show, but we have an opportunity to extend that out and make our industry and lifestyle more of a household name. There are so many programs and events that SEMA could use to promote throughout the year that we currently don't leverage. The more our industry is known, the more it protects our right to modify vehicles. We also have an opportunity to leverage the SEMA Show even more than we currently do. Look at the Go RVing campaign from the RVIA industry. They aren't out there promoting RVIA, but the lifestyle associated with the industry. Hands down, they do something for their members that is so beneficial, and we have that opportunity to do this too. RVIA is out there promoting the lifestyle of RVing and getting people excited about it. They do a great job marketing it nationally; they also do a great job representing the industry in the news as well. They have spokespersons who will speak on national news and be available for comment when anyone wants to speak to that industry segment. I want to see SEMA follow their lead.

My third is on vehicle technology. This is an area that I would like to see SEMA use its resources to help protect its members from the changes coming. Electronic stability control (ESC) was a significant concern for us and the National Highway and Safety FMVSS 126. This potential threat to our product caused us to seek out SEMA's program to work with ESC experts to certify our products. It was a game-changer in our confidence in selling a product that wouldn't interfere with the OE ESC system. But there are new threats in technology gaining ground. I love that SEMA has the two Garages and want to see ways for us to engage more of our members in these spaces. The work they are doing for emissions and ADAS is huge. I want to see ways that I can continue to support SEMA here.

8. Of the issues you identify above, which ONE concerns you the most as to how it will impact the industry's future? What would you do to initiate change to either expedite a positive outcome or prevent a potential disaster?

My biggest concern is legislation. I think this is the one area that could hurt our industry the most, and I believe we are not ready for the upcoming challenges we will be facing with the push to electrification. I am in California and see how aggressive a state can be to set goals like no gas vehicles sold after 2035. We need influence in DC and local jurisdictions. Individual memberships will help us gain attention. But we need more lawmakers who are willing to listen and work with us.

We now have a leader in Washington, D.C. to set strategy for Capitol Hill and state jurisdictions. This is a big win for us, we will need to continue to find ways to support her. We can see how votes at a local level like Oceano Dunes can significantly impact a market segment that uses the dunes for off-roading. Also, like in Sacramento, where you aren't allowed to work on your vehicle in your driveway within city limits. We could have influenced these challenges if we could be in more places. I want to see SEMA take a bigger, more aggressive or assertive stance in these areas. And I believe we are on the right path now. We will need to continue to support the DC team and keep our foot on the gas to support issues that affect our industry.

#### **Part 4 – Association Specific Observations**

9. Of the 9 [SEMA Strategic Priorities](#) the SEMA board and the association are focused on, which 2 do you think are the most critical and what can you do to contribute to the success of these initiatives?

Our strategic priorities are as follows.

1. **EMISSIONS**
2. **REGULATORY ISSUES (NON-EMISSIONS)**
3. **TRADE SHOWS - IMPROVE & EVOLVE**
4. **MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVEMENTS**
5. **MOTORSPORTS - PRESERVE & GROW**
6. **IMPROVE MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**
7. **ADDRESS COMPLEX VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY & OEM RELATIONSHIPS**
8. **PROMOTE AUTOMOTIVE LIFESTYLE**

I am proud that I got to be a part of establishing these SEMA Strategic Priorities listed above. I believe these are all very important and valuable, and I appreciate that the top two here are focused on regulatory and legislative Issues. I agree that these issues are all critical. But all the seven points deserve attention and resources to help preserve and protect our industry.

The two I believe are the most important might be redundant, but I hope you find that I'm consistent. Number two, regulatory issues and number four, marketing and communications is key are my tops areas.

Like I've said above, regulatory issues are going to be huge for our industry. We will need to focus on our relationships with lawmakers. As members we can't sit idly by; we must stay active and engaged. We must have a seat at the tables.

Marketing and communications are huge. We must have awareness of who and what we are at SEMA. We need the market to be engaged with us and want to protect their lifestyle.

There is a gap between programs and where SEMA aligns resources that match to the strategic priorities. During my time on the board, we did a program review of all of SEMA's programs. They are great programs on their own. We will need to make hard decisions, so we focus on the areas that are the biggest threats to our industry. We will have to make hard calls and sunset programs that don't support our strategic initiatives. I'm willing to step up and make those hard decisions.

10. As a SEMA Board member, how do you feel you would be uniquely qualified to help address the issues you identified above?

Experience is key as I look at the position of chair-elect. I can't imagine a chair-elect being effective coming in without current experience as a board member. As a board member, I know what is currently going on. I am aware of the challenges we face, and what currently are the greatest challenges. Being a board member, I understand how fluid the issues are; there are items that rise to the top we must face.

I have relationships with all the board members; I've worked years with a lot of the current board members. Because of all my experience on the board and within the councils, I have a great network to rely on. I've found having a trusting relationship is key for open and honest conversation. And of all times, now is the time for us to have those open and honest conversations. I know staff—I have relationships with the staff. I also have a trusting relationship with staff. I know I can be called on and staff can call on me.

I have served 17 years for SEMA in some sort of volunteer capacity. I have long-standing relationships with current volunteers and past volunteers. I know I can call on members whenever needed.

11. What industry trends or opportunities is SEMA the association and the SEMA Show missing out on currently?

SEMA doesn't need more to do. I believe it could stand to simplify and focus more on what it is good at versus adding more to our plate. The association has member benefits for all the niches it serves from retailers, manufacturers and service providers. What I'd like the association to do is focus on the few things it does well for its members.

There is an opportunity to leverage its engagement with councils and networks; we have so many engaged volunteers. It's a powerful group we can tap into more to help with our efforts in DC.

For the Show, I want to see us explore ways to add more value for its members. I love that the Show team is building the festival experience to the Show. There is a group of consumers that are going to be important to engage with. Engagement and building the SEMA brand outside the business-to-business experience is going to be key to SEMA's health as an association. We can't forget about our focus on business-to-business

interactions, and I see the way SEMA moving to the SEMA Fest experience will only help and protect the days that are set for business interactions.

12. How about its strengths?

SEMA has many strengths. One of the biggest was the financial structure that allowed us to survive a year without much of our revenue—the Show. While there are challenges ahead of us with budget, we are in a healthy spot to survive some bumps in the road. Other associations have not been as lucky.

The SEMA Show is a huge strength. We bring enthusiasts from around the world to gather and celebrate our industry. A key to our Show is that it is one of the largest gatherings of small businesses in the world.

We have active, passionate volunteers. We have a group with the councils and networks who are all working together for the health of the association.

SEMA has the Garages. Both California and Detroit support our members by making sure they have access to affordable solutions for emissions and ADAS lab support.

SEMA is a powerful association and Show. I want to see it gain more power for its members.

13. If you were to get elected to the board of directors, what topics or issues will you spend your time focusing on and how will you gain support?

Legislative and regulatory efforts will be key. We must protect our lifestyle, our jobs and our right to modify.

SEMA Show and marketing--we have to protect our name in the market. We need to bring people together to help us protect our lifestyle, our jobs and our right to modify.

Supporting small business—we are one of the largest associations that support small businesses. I want to protect this. There are many programs that SEMA offers that help “the little guy.” Those need to continue.

I will focus on all of this by bringing people together. I will rally our engaged volunteers around these issues.

**Part 5 – About You**

14. Questionnaires can be very limiting. In the space below, share with us anything we didn't ask that you believe will help the Nominating Committee develop a better understanding of you as a candidate:

This is an important time for our association. I feel like I'm uniquely qualified for what's



ahead. I'm great at bringing people together. I have a healthy network of people to rely on within the industry and outside the industry. I've been volunteering for SEMA for 17 years now. I started volunteering within TORA (then LTAA) and have experience within ETTN, SBN, and on the Board of Directors. I love this industry.

My company, Hellwig Products, is still family owned. I became woman-owned certified last year, and am serving as the fourth generation. I have a son, Jensen, that I have turned into a real car guy. But he now has crazy expensive cars he wants to own—one being an Audi R8. If you know me, you know I'm curious. I'm not afraid to ask what I don't know. I'm constantly learning.

I have always found opportunities in challenges. While our industry is facing a lot of challenges, I believe there is a chance for us to use that to our advantage.

And most of all, I love this industry and want to see it succeed and prosper.

15. Why do you want to volunteer to be a SEMA board member?

For me this is simple. I want to volunteer because I love this industry. I love SEMA and what it stands for. I love being able to help other small businesses. And I want it to be healthy for the potential for my son to have a real career in the industry—as well as all the next generations to be able to come into this industry to succeed and prosper.

## MELANIE WHITE

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### Profile

Executive leadership for 12 years, led company to triple sales in that time. Expert in customer, employee, supplier relationships. Loves setting strategic direction. Committed to continuous improvement.

### Experience

President, Hellwig Products Co., Inc. — 2005-Present

Had many positions within Hellwig Products,

- *2018 to Present* President: Set the strategy and culture for Hellwig. And continue to set the pattern and plan for growth, as well as growing our team. Manage day to day operations. Manage relationships with bankers, accountants, consultants. Oversee financial and overall health of the company.
- *2013 to 2018* Vice President: Continued to manage Sales and Marketing and added Accounting and Operations to my direct reports. Built a team to achieve our growth.
- *2010 to 2013* Director of Sales and Marketing: Managed Hellwig's customer programs and sales strategy as well as continuing to manage Hellwig's brand in the market.
- *2006 to 2010* Marketing Manager: Managed Hellwig's brand by placing ads, starting social media, working with media professionals, and overall setting the strategy for our Brand in the market.
- *2005 to 2006* Outside sales: Cold calling, attending customer shows, sales calls to customers.

Manager, French Gourmet Bakery — 2003-2005

Managed all aspects of a French Gourmet Bakery, restaurant and wholesale bread delivery divisions. Managed employees for the restaurant and the wholesale business, purchasing for both businesses as well. Grew my experience with employee management, creating a customer experience and managing our supply chain.

Manager, Baskin Robbin — 1998-2003

Managed day to day operations of Baskin Robbins. Employee scheduling, setting up the daily till, and purchasing all products to keep the store running well. In this position I wore a lot of hats as a manager and also learned to decorate cakes to be able to fill another niche.

### Volunteer Positions

Board Member, SEMA — 2019-Current

Responsible for leading and guiding the SEMA Staff to execute day to day functions that support the association and industry.

Chair, SEMA Cares — 2018-2020

Responsible for setting and leading the strategic direction for the charities in the SEMA association. Responsibilities include but aren't limited to developing funding opportunities for our three charities, communication with the SEMA board, and communication with charity leaders.

Chair, LTAA, Light Truck Accessory Alliance — 2013-2015

Responsible for setting and leading the strategic direction for LTAA. Our goals during my leadership were growing awareness of LTAA member benefits and growing the memberships. It's now one of the biggest councils in my association.

California State University Chico, Chico, CA — Bachelors of Psychology with a minor in Business

### Skills

Intense proactivity and aggressiveness in driving to reach goals. Strong leadership skills, great passion for developing teams, strong skills for identifying growth opportunities.

### Awards

SEMA Person of the Year 2018

SEMA Business Woman for the Year 2016

SEMA News 35 Under 35 2014

Fresno's 40 Under 40 2012

### References

George Lathouris, Director of Sales for Warn Industries

Dan Kahn, President and founder of Kahn Media

Rich Barsimian, Director of Sales for ACT

Kim Pendergrast Owner of Magnuson Superchargers