

CONTRARY TO CONVENTIONAL DOGMA LIKEABILITY DOESN'T NECESSARILY SELL

Study by U of Oregon researchers shows the selling point of celebrity endorsements is the match between consumers' perception of a product and their perception of the celebrity.

Study -- which, unfortunately, used a sample of 200 undergraduates, an alarming research trend -- tested a fictitious disposable razor. Findings show that "attractive" celebrities cause consumers to both like the product more and be more likely to buy it. Likeability made no impact on the razor-buying public because good looks are what people want from razors.

Celebrity endorsers used in the study were selected on the basis of student ratings of their physical attractions, likeability & familiarity.

They were Robert Redford & Jaclyn Smith, whom respondents rated as both physically attractive & likeable; Bo Derek & John Travolta, rated as physically attractive but unlikeable; Woody Allen & Jean Stapleton, physically unattractive but likeable; and Howard Cosell & Billy Jean King, physically unattractive & unlikeable. John McEnroe, featured in an ad campaign for real disposable razors, was rated attractive but unlikeable.

The image of the product, therefore, should match the image of the celebrity endorser. Study also shows that men remember more of what unattractive celebrities say, while women are more likely to remember likeable celebrities' words.

ITEMS PRACTITIONERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

"No one can tell the story like the chief executive, and so I intend to tell the IBM story all over the world," says its new -- since February -- CEO, John Akers. Akers intends to 1) spread the message that IBM's presence is to the advantage of local communities and 2) change its image as a monster out to dominate the world's computer markets. "You have to conduct your business in a way societies around the world think you are a benefit. That requires a lot of communications on the part of industry and certainly a lot of communications on the part of IBM. So we are trying to tell the IBM France story and the IBM Japan story and the IBM Mexico story in those countries."

The push to push accreditation has begun. Not to sell practitioners on becoming accredited, but to sell employers & the public on the value of accreditation. "Accredited members of PRSA often complain that very few people outside the society understand the significance of the 'APR' after their names. So, to assist them, our chapter is running an annual ad in our most widely read local business publication -- Houston Business Journal -- briefly explaining accreditation, congratulating our newly accredited members and promoting those already accredited," Margot Dimond, Houston Chapter pres, told prr. As a result of the ad, Dimond reports an increased number of calls inquiring about membership & employee referrals. Designed by Serrano-Smith Creative, ad will run again in about a month. "Perhaps other chapters would like to try something like this." (Copy from prr.)

Amoco will pay the salaries of 75 Chicago students who will work this summer with nonprofit org'ns. "This is the third year we've been supporting NPOs on tight budgets," says Gene Cartwright, mgr employee rels. Chicago Alliance of Business, Employment & Training, working with principals & counselors in inner-city schools, will select the students based on family income, grades, attendance & deportment. Beside exemplifying cooperation between public & private organizations, program gives students business-related job experience.

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THOUGHTFUL, IN-DEPTH ARTICLES ARE THE BEST MEDIA PLACEMENTS, PARTICULARLY WHEN WRITTEN BY KNOWLEDGEABLE EMPLOYEES; DIGITAL'S ARTICLE WRITING PROGRAM IS A MODEL

Media relations 101. Remember what you learned in that course...and should be practicing? Richard Young, mpr of Digital's OEM Group (Hudson, Mass.) reviewed his objectives last year -- and launched an article writing program that he says is just common sense. "Every once in a while we have to be reminded that a lot of the things we do are common sense but we make them confusing. Our article writing program is back to basics. The foundation of the program is based upon what editors want for their readers. And this is important because their readers are our targeted audience," he told prr.

When Young joined Digital, he identified 68 key editors and about 7 or 8 specific pub'ns where Digital wanted articles published. "Last fall we went to the offices of these key editors. Established a relationship over a meal, talking about the industry in general but then zeroing in on what subjects they're looking for over the next 12 months." This has been systematized into an annual event. Fall was chosen because it's "when most of the editorial calendars for the coming year are being produced."

Visitations produced 87 desired subjects. Digital's article writing committee -- comprised of marketing people -- reduced it to 37. Knowledgeable employees are then identified to author the articles.

"Normally the employee with the knowledge is a very busy person. So it's important to have a one-on-one discussion with him or her about what we're trying to do, how we'll do it, the freelance writing assistance we'll give them." Initial resistance due to the time it takes to write an article is abated by "not asking them to reinvent the wheel -- just give us the parts & we'll put it together."

Before the article is written, an abstract is developed. "Discussing the abstract with the editor to determine the article's 'slant' is an important key to getting

"Third party" credibility of employee authors is well known. Usual resistance to using them is their reticence & fear their material will not pan out. Digital empowers employees by having them put forth the thoughts; pr's role is to shape, edit & place. PR dept's approach is "don't write it ourself, let them do it."

Program brochure further empowers employees to author articles by its list of "What Not to Worry About":

- 1) the opening,
- 2) the closing,
- 3) grammar, spelling, punctuation,
- 4) length.

Digital's writing assistance -- technical editor & freelance writers -- will take care of the first 3. The 4th will take care of itself. Included in the info package is a blank computer disk for use in authoring an article.



published. Obviously there's no guarantee that something is going to appear, but if you gear your program to what they want, your chances are better."

Article Placement When Young
As Media Relations started the pro-
Door Opener gram, he had 2 goals: 1) to get to know the editors personally, 2) to find out what they're looking for. But after the first visit, a 3rd goal was added: "a chance for editors to vent any feelings they had about dealing with Digital -- calls not returned, lack of followup, etc."

Now editors receive everything produced by the OEM Group -- direct mail, news releases, brochures. Each was asked if they would object to receiving "everything we produce. They said fine. I haven't had a negative response." In fact, positive things are happening. "Last year when I came on board we were receiving 2.3 calls a month. It's up to 25 now. Basically what we've done is improve contact with editors & establish credibility as a channel of communication, which leads to better coverage in the long run. That's all you can do. There's no magic formula. It's basic common sense."

VAUNTED HI-TECH "MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS" NOW MUST GIVE WAY TO REAL PUBLIC RELATIONS AS "INDUSTRY PAUSE" UNCOVERS BASIC PROBLEMS

During its salad days, every industry thinks it is "different" than the ordinary folk. Wang Laboratories, along with many other fast-growth

hi-tech companies, is facing what Apple Computer has euphemistically labeled "the current industry pause." Wang's response is a layoff of 1,600 employees. "Wang didn't nurture the corporate culture that it had developed," Patricia Seybold, editor of Seybold Report, an office-automation newsletter, told prr.

"Wang was a vital place to work. It had visionary leadership and management was very aligned with that vision. Then somewhere in the last 18-24 months, that began to sour. The company was growing very fast, hiring more & more people and promoting them so fast -- beyond the levels of their capabilities." Wang's middle management became characterized by "raging mediocrity." Because neither mgmt nor the human resources group "realized how important it is to pay attention to corporate culture, it got rotten."

ARTICLE WRITING PROCEDURE

1. Suggestion of subject submitted to program coordinator. Possible publication recommended by author.
2. Approval of subject by the article writing committee. Potential publication selected.
3. Abstract written and sent to coordinator.
4. Editor of trade pub'n(s) is sent a copy of the abstract. If acceptable, the editor determines the "slant" of the article.
5. Outline & draft of manuscript written.
6. Copy of manuscript to coordinator for approvals where needed.
7. Final, approved text sent to editor.
8. Article is published.

Bureaucracy Staff cuts are necessary to get rid of "the dead wood," believes
Sounds Familiar Seybold. She sees the need for an internal "cultural revolution." When visiting Wang's Lowell, Mass. hdqtrs last fall, she noted "the negative energy was almost palpable -- people protecting themselves, paranoid & preoccupied with covering their tracks. They weren't really listening to what customers were saying or worrying about getting their jobs done."

When growth is fast, as it has been in the hi-tech industry, "you can't just keep adding & promoting people and think everything is going to be hunkydory. You've got to make sure everybody still knows what the game is. That's what Wang didn't do." Other reports suggest most hi-tech companies made similar miscalculations.

ANOTHER MISLEADING TITLE, "CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER," HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PR

It's being used in a growing number of large corporations. But it will be misleading to many. Position manages data processing, office automation & communications systems and "uses this technology strategically in terms of products & applications for customers," Lee Caudill of Cresap, McCormick & Paget (NYC) told prr.

She foresees confusion with the public relations function regarding the word "information." Similar to the confusion when people see "Communications Industry Practice" -- the phrase used to describe what her unit of the mgmt consulting firm does. "I thought people would instantly know that it refers to media & telephone companies. But half the time I get calls from public relations people thinking I'm in communications."

Information "has an electronic ring in private industry. It almost always connotes data as in Management Information Systems, information systems, information processing," Edward Hansen of Towers, Perrin, Forster & Crosby (NYC) told prr. He sees limited chance of confusion.

Disagreeing is Alden Wood (vp-pr, American Mutual Insurance, Wakefield, Mass): "I don't favor the new title. Information is information to the public, including the press, it seems to me. The CIO should be the public relations honcho, not the head number cruncher!"

Public relations goes far beyond information. Nonetheless, do we want to concede another identifier to technology?

2 OF 10 WORKERS FACE PERSONAL BARRIERS; MORE EMPLOYERS ARE IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS TO HELP EMPLOYEES WITH OFF-THE-JOB PROBLEMS

Virtually no employee assistance programs existed 15 years ago. By 1979, 5500 had appeared. Now studies show that number has

doubled. The growth, a Boston U researcher told Nat'l Ass'n of Social Workers' annual conf, is due to a growing recognition that many workers are too occupied by personal problems to put in a solid day's work.

Programs are needed because 2 in 10 workers have problems with alcohol, drugs or mental illness. Then there are spouse, landlord & other issues. Troubled workers account for \$102.9 billion in lost productivity, so programs save money. Statistics show they cut absenteeism & use of medical benefits substantially. One estimate is that for every \$1 spent, \$8 are saved.

PR: Information

Language

Employee Relations

Social Services

Tech

OD