

together 260 pages of the best resources in the peace movement. They wouldn't touch it with a 10 foot pole! That's when the idea for a comic book came up," Lou Ann Merkle, assoc dir of youth outreach prgm, told prr.

"Real War Stories" is just that -- war & military experiences of real people. Strategy is stories will have greater impact because "this is happening right now, to people like you & me." Purpose is to 1) educate, 2) increase awareness of the realities of military involvement, 3) challenge readers to make thoughtful, informed decisions about military service.

Is it effective? "No doubt about it. We have tons of mail, people ordering the book or telling how they feel about it. They're appreciating it and it's speaking to all ages." One couple sent \$100 check & thanks, saying their son wouldn't listen to them but did hear what the comic book had to say and changed his mind about enlisting.

Of 47,000 originally printed last July, 21,000 were presold by publisher (Eclipse Comics). The rest were gone by Jan. 1. Second printing of 25,000 has already been done.

When project began, CCCO had no money for it. "We asked people to volunteer their talents. We enlisted some incredibly talented people within the comic industry" -- writers & artists of G.I. Joe, Swamp Thing, Star Trek, Spiderman. But when it came to getting it illustrated, it kept getting shuffled to bottom of pile so artists could do their "bread & butter" work. "Eventually we had to raise money and pay them in order to get the book completed. It was an expensive project, but I'd do it again." (\$2 from CCCO, 2208 South St, Philadelphia 19146; 215/545-4626)

THE FORGET FACTOR '88 Political media director David Garth, explaining why his tv push for Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore will be effective in New York primary despite Gore's lackluster showing elsewhere: "Except for you & me & a couple of nuts out in the field, nobody knows what happened in Illinois -- they think Lincoln won. We don't remember past 15 minutes, much less 15 days."

#### ITEM OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

The Workplace & AIDS: A Guide to Services and Information is a free 36-pg directory of over 50 organizations, educational programs, consultants, articles, a/v, brochures. Services are listed under 10 categories: company policy, employee education, general education, information resources, legal issues, medical coverage, public policy, science, testing, and worker protection. Each listing includes address, phone number & brief summary. (To submit information or order: Margaret Magnus, editor, Personnel Journal, 245 Fischer Avenue B-2, Costa Mesa, California 92626; 714/751-1883)

To maximize outreach, Merkle put together a 4-pg flier that tells about the comic book and, in comic book format, gives ideas for getting the message out. Back page gives instructions for reaching mainstream media, religious and peace & justice groups, institutions. Some mainstream media are writing CCCO for review copies. Playboy reprinted excerpts of a letter Merkle wrote along with some pictures of comic book and encouraged readers to get info before enlisting. "We've been drowning in mail since then."

# pr reporter

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## AIRLINES NOW FRONT PAGE -- MOSTLY FOR BAD NEWS; IN THE ERA OF COMPETITIVENESS, ARE THEY A HARBINGER?

Do any of these airlines conditions apply to your sector?

A. Industry is now a cartel. And acting like it. With the low-price carriers pushed out, along with about half the old competition, the surviving dozen or so lines end up 1) successfully deregulated, 2) starting to raise fares wherever possible, 3) forcing most passengers to go thru hubs, resulting in at least one stop & thus longer travel time; direct flights are practically nonexistent to many cities where a few years ago they were frequent.

B. But the industry faces a strategic marketing conundrum. After all the hassle of dereg, bankruptcies, takeovers, near-misses & great employee strife, airlines succeeded in lowering fares -- for the occasional traveler. Regular (business) customers have been punished by little if any decrease in fares -- & far worse traveling conditions, including heightened safety fears.

C. Thus, 2 major publics have not benefited: employees & regular customers. For whose benefit was all this done, then -- stockholders? Well, profits are spotty -- and '88 is predicted to be a volatile year.

D. In the public relations arena, such dissatisfaction with performance has arisen that the gov't now demands monthly reports on a) on-time records, b) bumped passengers, c) lost baggage, d) complaints. This is a regular news feature in media everywhere & a topic at point-of-purchase -- airports & travel agencies.

Several other sectors have some or all these warning signs. Here are some successes & failures in airlines pr tactics that bear considering:

1. Going around the media by going direct to target publics. With most coverage unflattering if not hostile, several airlines have been using computer letters to customers. Eastern's yearend series also took a friendly poke at the way media report on it.

2. Taking initiative when bad situations arise. American's svp-mktg wrote to passengers aboard flights caught in a Dallas ice storm & delayed up to 24 hours. Ground personnel handled the situation poorly, however, so for some the letters backfired -- reminding customers of their anger & distress.

3. Being more responsive (sometimes) to complaints. Those who wrote to complain about the AA Dallas problem received \$100 vouchers to cover their hotel costs. At least squeaky wheels get grease.



4. Forming user groups of better customers -- frequent flyer programs. Major benefit may be mailing lists for monthly promotions. First class upgrades, other bennies help offset cattle car traveling conditions, other gripes.

5. Decimated pr staffs can't cope -- so industry is trying a coalition effort. At dereg in '81, staffs were reduced by half or more. United, e.g., cut 10 field offices. Ex-staffer Don Cannalte told prr work had focused on issues like noise abatement, environment. "Before, it was so proactive. Airlines took on the tough issues & did so in a professional way. But deregulation ended that. Everyone got defensive & it became marketing driven with the emphasis on filling seats."

So far, coalition -- working with Burson-Marsteller -- hasn't gotten started. But its statements suggest it will do collectively what pre-dereg staffs did.

6. Sticks-in-the-mud become risk takers to compete. What else accurately describes Northwest's smoking ban, above & beyond new regs?

7. Is removing or restricting a heavily promoted benefit bait-&-switch? Frequent flyer programs reportedly are threatened. Many travelers have stuck to certain carriers or taken specific itineraries to win triple mileage or get points for a vacation trip. How will they react if airlines carry out threat? Marketing still doesn't understand relationships -- or, some might say, ethical practices.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PR FIRMS:  
KCS&A GOES PROFESSIONAL ROUTE WITH PARTNERS  
A LA LAW FIRMS, KAMBER GROUP UNIONIZES

ownership. Kanan, Corbin, Schupak & Aronow (NYC) has chosen the law firm, medical practice, architectural firm model. Practitioners who reach key positions become managing partners. The firm cites these advantages:

1. Client service improves since the partner is directly accountable & involved in day-to-day activities, not a salesman who disappears after the client is signed on.

2. Turnover of key people is stanchd; what there is occurs at a lower level, support staff.

3. Partner controls his or her destiny, cannot have the firm sold out from

Ken Smith succumbed to cancer last week -- Kenneth Oowler Smith to the many who practiced alongside, studied under or worked on professional issues with the only educator elected PRSA president. His return to university, to earn his PhD & enter a brilliant teaching career, deprived Western Airlines of a true-believer pr pro. Ken's tales of the feats performed to lure us to the skies contrast with today's public-be-marketed approach. But he would like his obit in an airlines story. The job in those postwar years was really barnstorming -- flying from city to city to woo opinion leaders, media & customers on board the modern miracle, those flying coaches. Bon voyage!

Most firms pattern themselves after ad agencies that are gobbling them up calling themselves "agencies" & taking the stockholder route to

Can public relations be a profession if its counseling firms are corporations controlled by 1 or 2 execs, who can sell (or acquire other firms) at will? This makes practitioners little more than chattel -- and society may not grant the responsibilities of professionalism to persons who cannot control their actions independently.

under them by a large stockholder. "In the majority of firms, upper level executives find by their middle to late 40s they are at the end of the road."

"If you won't print nonunion, why communicate nonunion?" asks D.C.'s Kamber Group. Employees are represented by the Newspaper Guild. "Look for the union label" say the firm's ads. Labor organizations & organized companies are prime targets.

TALK ABOUT PERCEPTION PROBLEMS,  
POST OFFICE HAS A BIG ONE

It was mandated by Congress to cut \$1.2 billion from its budget within the next 2 years. A year ago, "without any knowledge we were going to be hit with this reduction," PO applied for the rate increase which just went into effect. What the public sees is that they're getting less & paying more. "But the increase will do little to offset the cut. It's awfully hard to eat \$1.2 billion. That's a sizable chunk of our budget," Steve Korcker, media rels rep, told prr.

The cuts are "largely internal," customers are feeling the crunch with shorter window hours. Local postmasters are given options to choose in handling reductions. "We've tried to spare the general public from feeling the effects of these cuts as much as we could. This was not designed to generate any back lash from them."

Whether cuts are internal, as the USPS can itemize for any interested inquirer, or where the customer can feel them is irrelevant. The customer's perception is that they're getting less and paying more.

"Postalologist" John Jay Daly (DC) -- a PO watcher for over 25 years -- disagrees. He told prr: "Are you familiar with the Washington Monument syndrome? When they cut the budget of the Interior Dep't, which affects the park service, they don't cut internally. They close the Monument. Then the tourists all complain to Congress. So where does it hurt? That's what the Post Office is doing."

ZIP+4 Is Working But not without some difficulty in the beginning, notes Daly. "They positioned it wrong. They called it 9 Digit ZIP. Impression was, 'Oh no! I have to memorize more numbers.' That never was the case. It's now officially called ZIP+4, which is what they should have called it in the first place. They were only adding 4 digits, not changing the original 5. But by the time they unpositioned it, clarified it & fought Congress -- who said 'you can't do this to the American people' -- technology supplanted the need for customer applied 9 digit ZIPs."

Optical character readers can look at 4-line addresses and instantly translate them into a bar code & print it at the bottom of the envelope. "It's equivalent to what the 9 digits would be. And they can do this at blizzarding speeds. Machines process 10,000 times faster than the human eye. Technology has overcome the need to have it mailer applied. The 9 digit ZIP is alive & well, but it's in a different format. It's in bar coding."

IF YOUR AUDIENCE IS TEENAGERS,  
SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE -- COMIC BOOKS

That's the medium Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors is using. "It grew out of my work speaking to high school students. Viet Nam vets & refugees from war torn countries would tell their experiences. Often students were very moved and wanted to pursue it further. So I put