

ITEMS OF INTEREST FOR PRACTITIONERS

Do Some Publics Want To See It In Writing despite overcommunication & the problem of breaking thru the clutter? Bill Corbett of Int'l Ass'n of CPAs says informal studies on his members find their professional work style -- everything orderly & on paper -- may make them resist phone communications. Or at least not prefer them. Which raises another Q: if an audience says it prefers written info, will those folks read it when it arrives? Worse conundrum: do an audience's self-perceptions thru research on how they want to get info accurately model their actual behavior? One certainty: customer satisfaction is at risk if we give people info in a way they say they don't prefer even if their actual behavior is different. Surely this is Research Project # 1 these days.

Firm Uses Dummies To Break Thru The Clutter With Clients. "Humor can be a powerful management & marketing tool," says Dale Brown, pres Brown & Martin (Waukesha, Wis). "It can gain attention, create rapport & make ideas more memorable. It can also relieve tension & motivate people." The pr firm uses ventriloquist puppets to communicate with clients, parodying employee attitudes & corporate problems. Such programs represent 20% of the firm's practice. "They range from one-time motivational messages to comprehensive year-long sales & comm campaigns." Brown has been named 1989 Ventriloquist of the Year -- the first non-entertainer to get the award.

Follow Up Study Of Company's Wellness Programs shows big money saved, says Nat'l Employee Services & Recreation Assn. Cullinet Software (Westwood, Mass.) implemented 3 programs promoting employee health: a) smoking cessation, b) hypertension screening, c) stress management. Assessment indicated smoking program saved \$16,000 in maintenance costs & medical/hospital visits for respiratory problems. Other 2 are also estimated to have saved thousands of dollars in insurance costs & time away from work. (Formulas for computing costs & other wellness programs that impact the bottom line from NESRA, 2400 S. Downing Avenue, Westchester, Ill. 60254)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. CPRS 1989-90 national officers: pres, John Francis (chrm, Francis Williams & Johnson Ltd, Calgary); pres-elect, Barbara Sheffield (nat'l dir coms, The Arthritis Society, Toronto); vp, Peter Harvey (employee coms mgr, B.C. Telephone Co, British Columbia); treas, Brian Leyden (exec vp, OEB International, Toronto).

IABC 1988-89 executive board: chrm, Brad Whitworth (mgr, internal comn, Hewlett-Packard, Palo Alto); vice-chrm, Ron Martin (vp employee comn, American Express, NYC).

RETIRES. David Kirby (dir corp pr, Hewlett-Packard, Palo Alto) after 27 years. Established company's first pr dep't; received Rex Harlow Award from PRSA for career-long contributions to pr & for high ethical standards.

HONORS. Laer Pearce (pres, Laer Pearce & Assocs) receives Distinguished Service Award from PRSA/Orange County for contributions to pr & the community.

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,
Public Affairs & Communication

Vol.32 No.28
July 17, 1989

603 / 778 - 0514

NAMES & TERMINOLOGY HARBINGER LINGUISTIC -- AS WELL AS SOCIO-POLITICAL -- TRENDS: STUDY OF RECENT DECADES GUIDES CHOICE & USE OF NEW TERMS

Semantics, along with myth & symbols, may constitute the basis of pr technology in the 90s. For instance, naming trends tend to correspond to business & societal climate of the times. Study from ABC Namebank Int'l (NYC & Toronto) of Fortune 500 monikers of past 30 years outlines language/thought patterns. Findings suggest practitioners' -- the word merchants in their organizations -- choice of names & titles for projects, programs, processes, products, services may predetermine their acceptance by intended audiences -- subliminally stating whether they are "in" or "out," "here & now" or "then & there."

Indications are for a trend of 1) distinct, 2) memorable, 3) coined terms -- which must be a) transparent, b) translatable, c) understood globally. While this is true of names, titles, appellations, it is more & more required for broad areas of terminology.

History: Personal names were the norm at the turn of the century.

Business, driven by entrepreneurship, innovation & vision, spawned legendary examples of American enterprise.

"Heinz," "Kraft," "Ford," "Singer," "Firestone," "Mellon" became synonymous with American ingenuity. Then things began to change.

Geographic connotation, e.g., Western Pacific, denoted power. As times changed, so did boundaries & such names became too limiting. Note how Northwest Airlines became Northwest Orient in an effort to sound more global. The augmentation was later dropped when too many people assumed airline only flew to China & Japan.

1. Lengthy Names (50s): The economy was booming, Japan wasn't an economic threat, world market was beginning to open up. Long names, sometimes embodying 4-5 words, were common.
2. Acronyms & Telescoping (60s): Economy tightened & so did names. Lengthy ones were difficult to communicate electronically, inconvenient for stock exchange boards. "Texas Company" became "Texaco," "Pepsi-Cola" became "Pepsico." Acronyms, e.g., "NASA," "LASER," "RADAR" were deemed effective tho they didn't always convey sense or suggestion, and it was not long before choices for initial combinations ran out. Today, "corporate name initialization" & telescoping are rarely seen.



3. 2-word Names (late 60s, early 70s): Often consisting of a powerful word + a business term, they didn't specify any particular enterprise or product. "Control Data," "Multiple Access," "General Dynamics," etc.
4. Coining (70s): Pure inventions like "Exxon" or "Xerox" -- names with memorable sound but no meaning. Powerful sounding phonetics -- "x" & "k" were heavily employed & soon overspent. Trend turned to softer, less dynamic sounds.
5. Chaos (present day): The acceleration of business processes, tech miracles, massive mergers & diversification have given birth to new industries. Traditional classes of names have been exploited to full capacity, yet initials, acronyms, 2-word names & meaningless coined words still abound.

Future: Even sharper competition, new demands, higher expectations will threaten the hardest organizations. Overcommunication will make it harder than ever to grab attention inside organizations & out. Danger of anonymity & lost identity will be a major concern -- imposing greater-than-ever significance on names & terms used for everything.

RHODY: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS BEST WAY TO HANDLE MEDIA DURING CRISIS -- & ANYTIME During a crisis, "The goal is to control the information flow," Ron Rhody, svp-corp comms Bank of America, told NSPRA annual seminar. During B of A's dark period in the early 80s, dealing with crisis communications became a way of life. He found the best technique was one-on-one media interviews -- not press conferences.

Today, B of A almost always uses individual media interviews for any & all important communication. When there is important news to release, crisis or no, Rhody's dept follows this procedure:

- 1) Prepare release.
- 2) Call key media of importance to the organization & its target publics. Explain that an important release will be distributed at X time on X day. Ask reporter if s/he would like a one-on-one interview then & set time.
- 3) Prepare talk sheets for management to use. Every question a reporter is likely to ask is covered. Manager is encouraged to use own words, but stick to facts outlined.
- 4) Training & review for participating manager. "Most managers have received media training prior to this time. B of A trains potential spokespersons as far down as branch managers."
- 5) On day when release has gone, Rhody's staff calls the reporter at the appointed time & puts them on the line with the interviewee. "Some reporters are allowed 5 minutes for an interview, others 10. No one is allowed more than 15 minutes, period."

"Today, we only use press conferences when 1) our story is weak & needs excitement, or 2) when we must get out news immediately, before a release & interviews can be set up". Reporters like it better, too, he feels -- since other media can't steal answers to their good questions.

"Very few crises in an organization are surprises to everyone. Somebody knows and crises occur when pr is not cut in."

This is in keeping with Rhody's experience -- shared at IABC's conference earlier -- that practitioners should stop "thinking of mass public opinion" and concentrate on "micro-opinion," i.e. reach those who care or will be impacted & not the universe. One-on-ones are ideal for targeting media based on which publics can help or hurt you.

FIRST FALLOUT OF ABORTION WAR: CORPORATE CONTRIBUTIONS SCRUTINIZED

This month's Ms. mag cover assesses the situation: "IT'S WAR!" How can non-combative organizations avoid the fray? Many are finding their giving habits implicate them. While pro-choicers turn noses up at Domino's Pizza because of owner Tom Monaghan's overt efforts against abortion (prx 5/29), counter camps are deploying similar tactics. As a result, donors are skittish.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America is struggling to clarify its role in the conundrum. It stresses that out of 2.5 million clients a year, fewer than 100,000 (4%) are abortion cases. Still, its association with the pro-choice lobby is a highly visible one -- full-page ads in various magazines. Several companies, pressured by pro-life groups, are cutting contributions:

1. Union Pacific stopped its customary \$10,000/yr. Sec'y Chuck Olson, who made the decision, refused comment, but another UP source told prx that the pressure came less from the public than from stockholders, who themselves were not excited by PPFA's campaign to uphold abortion rights.
2. JC Penney: "As long as it supports abortion, we won't support it, because the country is too torn up about it right now."
3. Pillsbury, while defending its donations, admits the constant barrage of letters & calls from pro-lifers is a "continuing annoyance."
4. Says Calvin Mayne, vp Gannet Foundation, "No CEO is comfortable with letters saying: 'You're murdering babies.'"

Since this is only the first of several wrenching, irrational, emotional issues slated for debate in the 90s, perhaps its major impact on pr is as testing ground for avoidance tactics.