

areas increased 55% from '78 to '88. Shift to suburbs might imply increase in income level directly promotes mobility, creating a less definable ethno-consumer group. But other data shows over 50% of all affluent blacks live in inner cities, close to their roots. "That they resist patterns of suburban flight, which other ethnic groups embrace when incomes increase, indicates a defined group that cuts across income levels." Weiss says this highlights a key question: "At what point are they responding to targeting specifically because they're African Americans" -- as opposed to other, non-racial motivations?

Biggest mistake to avoid is trying to talk to "Joe African American." "Any effort to sum up the community in a single image is going to be galling to Africa Americans." The key is in "orientation" rather than "affirmation," i.e., orient messages toward the great variety within that community, just as with any other community.

4. **Media Distortion.** According to Weiss, empirical evidence comparing crime stats in certain cities with race & photo coverage shows blacks receive significantly more media attention. Same yardstick applied to cultural events shows much less attention given to blacks.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

- ¶ **Hate Groups Try To Appear Mainstream** by altering cartoons by famous artists and using them in their own publications, charges Anti-Defamation League. ADL has tracked several incidents where Gary Larson's "The Far Side" & Jim Davis' "Garfield" have appeared in publications like Spotlight, New American View & NAAWP (Nat'l Ass'n for the Advancement of White People) News, sometimes with words or picture altered to fit propaganda needs. Similarly tainted has been work by political cartoonists. "This practice is likely to give readers of extremist materials the false impression that mainstream authors or artists agree with their opinions," says ADL.
- ¶ **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Lists Health Hazards By State.** Centers for Disease Control (Atlanta) conducted a national study on 7 risk factors related to leading causes of death: weight, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, alcohol abuse, nonuse of seatbelts, infrequent cholesterol screening, not having mammograms. Report lists states with lowest & highest percentages for each risk factor. NH, for example, has the highest alcohol risk (10.8%) while North Dakota has the lowest (3.3%). But more women in NH have had mammograms (67.5%) than in other states. Report helps focus efforts for employers & public health practitioners. (More from CFDC, 404/639-3311)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

RETIRED. Bill Moore, as director of publications for the Ohio State Bar Ass'n. Known for his efforts to

unite the practices of law & public relations, he will be adjunct prof of pr at Franklin U (Columbus).

pr reporter

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PRICING STRATEGY v. PERCEIVED HONESTY: UPCOMING EXPOSE BRINGS CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS, MARKETING PSYCHOLOGY INTO QUESTION; ISSUE UNDERSCORES NEED FOR PR BOTH BEFORE & AFTER THE DECISION

Predicaments wrought by impolitic pricing ought to encourage organizations to bring public relations into such decisions -- and early on. Food companies are cringing as media heralds upcoming state gov't exposés into cases where a) contents are reduced, b) yet price goes up or stays the same, c) & package size does not get smaller to signal reduced content.

Practitioners are already involved in the clean up -- naturally! Involvement during the decisionmaking process might have avoided the issue 1) by changing the course or, if the decisions are justifiable, 2) by communicating them openly & believably to consumers.

PACKAGE DOWNSIZING HAS A DECEPTIVE FEEL

So charge critics. It's one thing to watch a candy bar shrink while remaining at 55 cents, it's another to find out a can of coffee looks the same as it did last year, but holds less. "They use subtle & unannounced ways to take advantage of consumer buying habits," claims NY Ass't Atty Gen Sandy Mindell. Rallied by irate consumers, his office investigated & is about to 1) publish a report & 2) file a bill requiring companies to signal content changes on the package. Texas & other states are looking at similar measures.

RESPONSES = RATIONALIZATIONS? In defense, companies cite:

1. **Enviro Concerns.** Star-Kist claims its smaller cans are a boon since they use less steel.
2. **Competition.** Near East Rice cut contents by 1-1/2 oz. to stay within a competitive range. Efferdent replaced its 96-tablet box with a 90-count to be in line with the 84-count box of its chief competitor.
3. **Yield.** "We reformulated our instant tea and there is a weight reflection," Lipton's Larry Hicks told pr. "But it yields the same." Hershey's dpi Natalie Bailey: "Our chocolate mix hasn't been 'downsized.' Volume is the same, tho

"Companies are under increasing pressure to 'streamline' packaging for environmental friendliness," Consumer Alert pres Barbara Keating-Edh told pr. But smaller packages save materials, stock space, gas for transportation. Manufacturers are "absorbing those savings; consumers should benefit from them as well."



weight is lower. It produces the same number of glasses. We lowered the price on the most popular size."

"Even companies not profiting from discrepancy must walk the line between a) convincing consumer publics they are getting the same "yield" & b) inflaming the issue. Besides, as Keating-Edh points out: It's ineffectual for a shrunken package to promote "yields" because customers don't look at them for value. Yet marketers do this time & again. "It's hard to gauge the value of concentrated, freeze-dried, etc. Companies which try to boast about amount of laundry loads per box, & similar, confuse the public. People aren't aware of how much yield they got before anyway."

- 4. **Costs.** Increases reflect raw materials, labor, benefits, transportation, etc. Lynn Haley, pr, P&G (Pampers) agrees this is a major factor. Why not increase price rather than take 8 diapers out of the package? This is where marketing needs pr counsel on decisions.
- 5. **Retailers.** "Often, companies adhere to retailer demands," consumer researcher Lisbeth Echeandia (Dallas) told prr. "Retailers want coffee cans to be uniform to fit shelves." This gives manufacturers little room to try variations in packaging.
- 6. **Trade.** "Companies manufacture to a price point," says Echeandia. "With candy, for example, all products are about the same price, tho solid chocolate costs much more than nougat." This is because the trade ass'n wants consistency.
- 7. **Price barriers.** Marketers feel consumers will not go above certain prices, e.g. no more than a dollar for a candy bar. This, they feel, justifies package shrinkage.

ROLL CALL SHOWS LITTLE PR INVOLVEMENT...UNTIL CLEANUP

Echeandia feels in the future, companies should consider involving their pr counsel in pricing policies, and thus avoid situations like the current clamor. "I think it would be a very good idea to get practitioners involved early."

Pricing decisions are now made independent of counsel (tho most queries & complaints are routed to pr staff). Only Hershey may have involved public relations -- tho probably not in a significant way. "Pricing strategy is impossible to divulge because it's confidential," says Bailey. "But whenever there is a decision that will affect how we are perceived, pr staff is contacted." But Haley's (P&G) response is more typical: "We would never be involved in pricing decisions."

Lipton doesn't have in-house pr. "We don't have an inside person carrying that title," says Hicks, vp & legal counsel, who is fielding media inquiries. "We wouldn't bring in an outside pr person just because we were reformulating. I guess we didn't anticipate this because our weights have always gone up & down." Strategy now, he says, is to respond but not make a big deal of it. "We don't want to dredge this up any more than we have to. Our explanations are so technical -- they probably have little public appeal."

**Of Related Interest...
POSTAL SERVICE CONFRONTS A DIFFERENT
KIND OF PRICING ISSUE: CONVENIENCE**

In this fast-paced age where homes & offices alike are cluttered with information and people

wear several hats, convenience has become a commodity. "People are willing to pay a price for time," says Consumer Alert pres Barbara Keating-Edh. "Just look at the sale of microwave foods." Perhaps that is why USPS is getting so much flack for its decision to up the price of 1st class stamps to 29 cents. "Most complaints are about the inconvenience of a 29-cent stamp," USPS dpi Arthur Shealy told prr. Apparently more aggravating than the increase -- a full 8% -- is the idea of scrounging pennies. "People just are not used to the odd number. Remember, we had a 22-cent stamp. People have just become accustomed to the quarter."

Since the increase has gone into effect, USPS has been the victim of scathing editorials. Shealy explains his position: "USPS is unlike any organization in its pricing strategy. We must break even (by law), with no profit." The Postal Rate Commission is watching to make sure increases are not too much. "We proposed a 30-cent stamp and the commission said it was too much. Convenience was not a factor in their decision." Why not then wait until later & bump to 30 cents? "There was no way we could delay it another year. We would have lost \$20 million a day every day we delayed. That's a large chunk of change when multiplied by the days of the year the post office is open."

Shealy says people who want to complain should realize that the Commission, not USPS, decided the price. "If you call them, they'll tell you it is in the consumer's best interest."

**TARGETING THE BLACK CONSTITUENCY
REMAINS AN AMBIGUOUS ENDEAVOR --
BUT IT'S NOT A MONOLITH**

While blacks gain stature in the political & entertainment realms, communication with them as a demographic group is more

difficult than ever. "It's a paradox that African-American community can be so prominent yet remain an enigma," researcher Edward Weiss, Packaged Facts (NYC) told prr. He details factors creating the problem:

- 1. **Widening Class Distinction.** "The last decade was a simultaneous boom/bust. Yuppies left the middle class for higher ground while blue collar workers departed in the opposite direction. Nowhere was this more deeply felt than in the African American community."
- 2. **Dubious Terminology:** "African American" or "black"? Hyphen in "African American"? Capital on "black"? Term is in a perpetual state of flux, used interchangeably without real distinction as to which is correct. At the same time, this diverse community is too often perceived as monolithic, highlighting the need for sensitivity to subgrouping. All blacks are no more alike than are all whites.
- 3. **Poor Info Dissemination.** Data from the Census Bureau, for example, is underreported & paradoxical. Example: Figures show blacks in suburban