

the subject of each message. However, the White House is not yet capable of sending back a tailored response via electronic mail. We are hoping this will happen by the end of the year. A number of response-based programs which allow technology to help us read your message more effectively, and, eventually respond to you electronically in a timely fashion, will be tried out." **Is this a feedback medium for practitioners to use?**

Even if it is faster, so what? Your message will probably still get lost in a sea of communications with little chance of reaching the guys. Still, it is the largest e-mail project to date -- "an historic moment in the White House," & soon to include several federal agencies.

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES

Purpose is to "increase

accessibility to the administration. A lot of people don't have the time or don't take the time to write a letter, include postage, mail it & wait for a response. So instead they can communicate via e-mail. It's faster, but because we can't yet give an immediate response with e-mail, writing a letter is still more personal." According to CompuServe, the amount of time it takes to deliver an Internet message varies from a half hour to 2 days. This is a function of Internet, not CompuServe.

WHEN MEDIA REPORT TRIVIALITIES THAT AMOUNT TO FEAR-MONGERING

Happens all the time, but here's a current example. "Fuel Rods Shift at Nuclear Plant" is the head on a wire service piece describing the "low-priority alert." Closing paragraph quotes the plant spokesperson: "There was no radiation exposure. There never was any danger to employees or the public." If that's true, why is this news? Why report it?

How many similar incidents that didn't amount to anything occurred that day, from fire alarms (which *might* have been major conflagrations) to weather advisories (which *could* have been serious storms)? Did they make the news? Even on a slow news day, one is left to conclude the reporter doesn't believe the spokesperson, or the industry in general. Which makes this an **editorial**, not news, with the only possible purpose being to raise doubts.

How to make lemonade out of this lemon? Use the case to 1) tactfully find out if the reporter does distrust you, your organization, your industry; 2) as an opportunity to teach the reporter about the safety systems, levels of alerts & similar, ideally by a plant tour.

NOTICE TO OUR READERS

As is our tradition, pr reporter will not be published next week to allow our printer and members of our staff a well-deserved vacation. Our office will be open for business, however.

INGREDIENTS OF A CRISIS PLAN THAT WORKED

Florida Power & Light's crisis plan weathered Hurricane Andrew last year. Its strategy is the realization "centralized control of communication doesn't work. What's needed is 1) **centralized coordination**," Stacey Shaw, mgr media rels, told pr. To make that work, the organization must give 2) **authority** to communicate, in this case to field & customer service workers, and 3) **training** on how to communicate.

BACKGROUND

FP&L reorganized & downsized, cutting "huge layers" of management. As a result, it didn't have past crisis experience or "oral tradition" to rely on. This forced company to 4) **inter-view** people with experience, then 5) **brainstorm** with the various operations groups to identify potential problems & how to communicate about them, or where operations would have to change "if no amount of communication could correct it." From this came 6) **45 key questions with detailed answers** -- the "cornerstone of our communication effort." Sent to employees charged with communicating FP&L's messages; & to the media. Brainstorming process is being used to prepare for other emergencies, e.g., an oil spill.

OTHER KEYS TO SUCCESS

7) **Executive involvement.** "Having either the president or CEO involved in the communication process added credence to what we were saying."

8) **Organization was "empowered"** because of recent reorganization resulting in fewer layers. Once people know their roles, "step back & let those folks make decisions, not try to control each aspect of the decisionmaking process." Sufficient training & understanding in advance facilitates this. "It's still One Clear Voice. It's just you don't have to ask each time for permission to carry it out."

9) **Routine system for providing information** that media & public could count on. "We had a regular news briefing every morning at 10am that tv stations carried live. Since we have a tv system within our organization, employees could tune in. Every morning all disciplines would meet to decide the day's overriding issues & what messages need to be given out." Also did an afternoon written update.

10) **Importance of visuals.** Tendency is to concentrate on messages, assume visuals will be gotten during news briefings, etc. "Early on we realized we were being inundated with requests. Easiest way to channel it was to do morning & evening photo-ops. We'd find locations where activities would be occurring, fax list to media. Field people knew in advance that media would be arriving. It cut down on the number of re-



quests & allowed us to focus on the big ones like Good Morning America & CNN that take lots of time to orchestrate." Also allows operations folks input on visuals, or to steer media away from one visual or subject toward another.

11) **Supporting employees** -- their needs during the crisis for things like food, water, childcare, pillows. "We had not made adequate preparations for ice & water. The company had enough to serve people at work, but nothing to take home. And people didn't have water at home. We ultimately worked out a plan. People who spelled us from other areas would fill up jugs of water & disperse, then take empty jugs back to refill. Also food. A large portion of the corporate office was shut down -- they were out in the field helping out. Figured there'd be plenty of sandwiches in the cafeteria for remaining staff. Found that was insufficient 1) for reasonably balanced meals & 2) because we couldn't often get away. We literally lived on the phone." Person in charge of educational services took on the role of "Den Mother" -- caring for kids, delivering meals, distributing water, "taking care of special requirements that people under stress have."

Tho hurricanes are a special kind of crisis, "if you think about all the requirements your people will need during any crisis, you'll be surprised at what you come up with."

12) **Multi-lingual needs.** FP&L sent messages in area's 2 major languages, English & Spanish. Others needed to be added -- French, Haitian, Creole. "Luckily, we had some employees who recognized this, translated press releases on their own & sent them to stations that carried programming for these groups." Needs could go beyond language to geographical or methods of receiving or processing info, advises Shaw.

RESULTS **Customer satisfaction improved 20%** after the storm because they "understood what we faced, how we were accomplishing it & how they could help us get the job done. They became part of the process or saw us working." Stats come from FP&L's own survey as well as a formal & informal survey done for the Miami Herald. Formal one placed military in 1st place of all agencies responding to the hurricane. FP&L came in 2nd. Informal survey was a call-in asking who performed best during the hurricane. Public picked FP&L.

While not formally measured, employee relationships strengthened. "We worked well as a unit, built camaraderie." A daily, lunch time, live news show was inaugurated informally at the start of the hurricane. Talked about what employees were doing to help each other & customers. For example, employees signed up for teams to help others repair their homes. HR has formalized this enthusiasm into employee support services.

OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH DISCOVERS WHAT & WHY OF ACTIONS

"Often people just can't explain why they do what they do because they aren't fully aware of what they are doing," writes Trevor Collier (Toronto) in his article "Dynamic Reenactment" -- adding to last week's story on com-

munity case studies. He illustrates by explaining Roger Schank's **script theory** -- people cope with routine actions & experiences by formulating scripts which provide them a way of not thinking. "Over time our scripts tend to become thoroughly habituated, codifying the more mundane actions in our lives." By observing actions, the researcher is able to break down the script and ask direct questions.

But going to the source of the action isn't always practical. He offers a methodology he calls **dynamic reenactment** -- "a stimulus that helps a respondent relive the thoughts & feelings she has when doing something in the 'real world.'" The stimulus triggers the respondent's script. Afterwards, the respondent talks about her feelings & thoughts about what just occurred. While this is not a new research technique, it needs to be "formalized and put into some theoretical context" rather than left to the instincts of researchers.

Process can be used to predict future behavior. "This works because scripts are learned & not instinctive. We learn them either by remembering & adopting the behavioral or attitudinal patterns of others (such as role models); or by remembering & codifying our early experiences in tackling a task." To predict behaviors, it's necessary to provide a stimulus "that causes him to react rather than to speculate cognitively, prompting him to reconcile the new event with his past script. Any dissonance will emerge quickly."

Elaborate sets or props aren't needed for *dynamic reenactment*. Collier gives the example of determining how consumers shop for cakes: "Researchers made no attempt to replicate a bakery shop in the focus group room. They simply brought in 12 sample cakes, set them out on a table and gave the respondents a chance to make notes while they silently browsed. A consensus was quickly reached on what cakes they didn't like and why. After that, the conversation deepened into how the respondents could tell, just by looking, which cake to buy. Among the results of that study were important insights relating to the semi-otic importance of fruit used to decorate cakes that might not have been gleaned by interviewing alone."

HAVE YOU E-MAILED BILL & AL YET?
Both Clinton & Gore are accessible, have issued an official announcement (thru the Office of Presidential Correspondence) that they want to hear from you and "your message will be read & receipt immediately acknowledged." But you must be able to access Internet because the White House is on this network. Internet is an electronic mail system connecting government, military educational & commercial organizations. CompuServe can access it; Prodigy does not. Check with your on-line network. Addresses are

Clinton: president@whitehouse.gov
Gore: vice.president@whitehouse.gov.

WILL IT REPLACE OR COMPLEMENT 800 NUMBERS? People have begun sending "a fair volume" of messages, a spokesperson told prr. "A careful count will be taken as well as