

have been bombed, execs sent death threats, armed guards ride Pepsi trucks. People are said to be angrier at Pepsi than at Ferdinand & Imelda Marcos!

SLIP-UP OR SYMPTOM?

Problem is, this is old news. "It's perplexing to us that this is getting coverage now," Brad Shaw, mpr, Pepsico Int'l (NY), told prr. "Since the LATimes story, a spate of additional media have covered it despite the fact this happened over a year ago. We basically made a goodwill gesture within 48 hrs after it happened back in May '92 with 80% of the consumers involved in the promotion taking us up on the offer.

"Since then our sales have rebounded, we're back to market share levels that are above what they were before the promotion. To us, the whole thing is behind us."

Is this just an error that slipped thru the cracks? What can happen when computer databases, now in universal newsroom use, aren't complete or badly indexed? Or a symptom of what can result when the bottom line is continually supported by newsroom budget & staff cuts?

"The only renewed focus is thru the media coverage -- a phenomenon we've been hardpressed to explain. We've done some background briefings with some key media but at this point we don't feel that issuing any statement or any proactive response is warranted given the fact that it's a year old & we've moved beyond it."

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

House Meetings To Be Used To Sell National Health Plan, reports the Clinton administration -- another example of how it employs sophisticated pr strategies. Week of 9/20 a presidential address will announce the plan. Democratic Nat'l Cmte, Families USA & others plan to organize house parties in living rooms across the nation that night & thereafter. Goal is to explain the plan, then organize volunteers to promote it in their communities. If questions arise at the meetings, 800 numbers will be available to answer them. prr first reported on house meetings 2/2/81 as an effective method used by activist groups to explain complicated subjects & get commitment by using face-to-face advocacy & group process. (Call or fax for copy)

Now The Word's Out Via Mass Media That Polling Is Questionable. Almost as if someone were mounting a campaign. Items: 1) Gallup's religious poll is shown by other researchers to be faulty. It reports -- based on survey research -- that 45% of protestants & 51% of catholics attend church regularly. Actually counting heads reveals the numbers to be 20% & 28%. (See last week's issue about predicting behavior thru research). 2) The Yankelovich & Black research org's took Ross Perot's poll results & showed -- via wide press coverage -- that the way his questions are phrased can make a tremendous difference in findings. 3) That most sensible journalist Jeff Greenfield devoted a column to how pollsters keep asking questions about things respondents know or care little about, then record the answers as the voice of the people.

PR MESSAGES SET RISK PERCEPTIONS -- & RISK IS EVERYWHERE

In prr's 1st of the Year issue '92 we proposed that all communications have become risk communications. Therefore, the rules for dealing with hazardous waste & cancer fears should be applied to every communication -- to employees, shareholders, stakeholders & customers, and surely to regulators, gov't entities & the body politic.

Why? Because today publics are interested in 2 things: What can you do for me? And what, if I'm not careful, might you do to me? That second query -- people's natural skepticism raised to new levels by today's troubled economy & quality-of-life -- adds a risk perspective to every message or appeal.

INFLUENCING PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF RISK

Risk communication is proactive. Its goal is to 1) improve knowledge, & 2) change perceptions, attitudes & behaviors of the target public, explain Leandro Batista & Dulcie Straughan (U of NC at Chapel Hill). However, risk perception -- a necessary step for behavior change -- is complicated. It can be

- objective (product of research, statistics, experimental studies, surveys, probabilistic risk analysis), or
- subjective (how those without expert or inside knowledge interpret the research or the situation -- which, some suggest, is based on their values and particular levels of experience & knowledge).

Thus experts & lay people -- or, management & employees, et al -- build different mental models that lead them to interpret risk activities differently. One does it objectively, the other subjectively.

CONTENT OF THE RISK MESSAGE FORMS THE RISK PERCEPTION

Example: radon & asbestos have a 25-fold difference in actual risk to the population, but generate only a slight difference in perceived threat -- because of the similarity of the message formats, usually expressed as "this is a technical area you probably don't understand & there's danger here." A systematic way of applying this factor:



1. **Each risk has its own identity** (or risk perception) which is a specific combination of subjective risk factors (see chart).

2. **Some combination of these "outrage factors"** (Weinstein & Sandman, '93) leads people to be more upset about hazard X than hazard Y.

| SUBJECTIVE RISK FACTORS | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Less Risky | More Risky |
| voluntary | involuntary |
| familiar | unfamiliar |
| controllable | uncontrollable |
| controlled by self | controlled by others |
| fair | unfair |
| not memorable | memorable |
| not dreaded | dreaded |
| chronic | acute |
| diffused in time & space | focused in time & space |
| natural | artificial |

3. **Not all factors are relevant for all risks**, and there is no trade-off among factors -- scoring high on one factor will not compensate for a low score on another (the "non-compensatory model"). Factors are either on or off in the overall perception of that risk.

4. **Therefore, it's important to understand the underlying dimensions that affect the perception of a particular risk** -- how the "outrage factors" combine to form a risk perception.

5. **Messages should not be formulated until this is understood.**

6. **Decisionmaking process:** With health or environmental risks, people will modify their behavior if a highly threatening situation exists (or is perceived) -- thus a minimum standard is set for risk acceptability. If a risk is greater than the threshold, action occurs; otherwise status-quo is preferred. In all probability, this is the same for risks of being overcharged, getting fired, losing on investments, etc.

CASE EXAMPLE Batista & Straughan studied the **underlying dimensions of risk perception** associated with lung diseases. 9 of their 10 questions were on "subjective risk factors." They found 2 dimensions underlying this particular risk: the dread factor (getting the disease) & the self-efficacy factor (one's ability to do something about it).

This means messages tied to other factors can be downplayed. These 2 factors should be the focus of messages -- and perhaps they can be linked, since combining a fear message with a "but you can take action" message has been shown to be effective by other research. (Copy of study from prr)

DON'T TELL ME YOUR MESSAGE. VISUALLY DEMONSTRATE IT

"About 80% of what we learn is done visually. Yet so many practitioners ignore visual presentations. If you want to get my attention & help me retain your message, demonstrate it," Jonathan Karas, director of Science House (Manchester, Mass), told prr. He offers these examples:

- **To demonstrate why the US Dep't of Defense should spend more on special-**

ized clothing to protect soldiers' lives: A Secret Service agent carries the original Declaration of Independence out of the National Archives into a waiting armored truck under guard. The escorted van moves carefully thru Washington to an unmarked ballistics range. Once inside, the Declaration is mounted in front of the target & a heavy jacket is hung over it. A sharpshooter fires 3 rounds striking the jacket violently. The jacket is removed & inspected. It has stopped & captured the 3 bullets without harm to the Declaration.

● **To demonstrate the idea of energy conservation:** Talking about "percentage reduction in megawatt usage" makes too many assumptions about how much jargon people understand. Instead, show "energy conservation in action" on tv. A camera crew at an electrical generating station would televise the meter showing the actual level of power consumption in the city. Once that's established, the spokesperson would ask viewers in the area to "take a minute to turn off one or more lights or appliances while we all watch the energy cost display." Three things can happen. The most probable is that the meter will show a noticeable reduction in energy use. Here is a dramatic cause-&-effect demonstration & the spokesperson then makes clear the points of the energy conservation policy. But what if the energy consumption stays the same, or increases? A clear message is still possible -- that altho many of us talk about energy conservation, few are willing to do anything about it.

● **The recitation of numbers in the millions, billions or trillions** makes eyes glaze over. People lose the point of the argument. Instead, use clear demonstrations with words to explain troublesome concerns.

- 1) **When proposing to cut spending by 20%**, take a \$100 bill mockup [or the real thing for more visceral involvement] and cut off 20% of it.
- 2) **When the annual wheat crop increases**, show a regular loaf of bread to illustrate last year's production, and a longer loaf to show the increase. Stay away from numbers alone. Who can visualize 50 million tons of wheat?
- 3) **When real estate costs rise**, show a modern house & cut off part of the garage to demonstrate the reality of budget limitations. At all costs, avoid lists of mesmerizing, illegible & unrelated numbers. Even the simplest graph sets up a communication barrier.

"I got tired of watching Clinton & Perot & others explain things to me using medieval bar graphs -- which 1) not many people really understand & 2) the print's usually too small to read anyway. Maybe it's a protective measure -- to keep people from knowing what's going on!" It's not difficult to demonstrate proposals or concepts, says Karas, a consultant on this subject. Mostly it's mindset -- we're conditioned to make our points using words.

YEAR OLD BAD NEWS MAKES FRONT PAGE: SYMPTOM OF WHAT?

Two months ago, an LATimes front page story announces that a contest goes haywire & 22,000+ sue Pepsi in the Philippines. Like Kraft's debacle a few years ago, problem is multiple winners due to error -- 800,000 bottle caps printed with the winning number. Story goes on to say that bottling plants