

aware of whether our efforts are successful, no matter how we measure this success. The pitfall into which many pr people tumble is that of trying to use the news media as a means to communicate with their other audiences, instead of going directly to those audiences."

-- Elizabeth Sisson, vp-comms, Perry & Banks (Portland, Maine)

- "The whole issue is inside staff vs. outside consultants...with 16 pr people there's adequate staffing to analyze news. CARMA is for the naive, the paranoid or the overbudgeted."

-- Harvey Posert, vp-pr, Robert Mondavi Winery (Oakville, Calif)

- "I took the news clippings & your piece to my Monday afternoon graduate theory & research class. They were incredulous. They couldn't believe such blatant evidence of ignorance (being generous) or stupidity on the part of both the Legislative & Executive branches of gov't.

"I'm not sure I would say anything different as a pr person than I would as a taxpayer. Obviously our gov't is involved in planning without evaluation, communicating without evaluation, & programming without evaluation. This is appropriate for a democracy? I don't think so. The failure to **require** evaluation is what is socially irresponsible."

-- Doug Newsom, prof, Texas Christian U (Ft. Worth, Texas)

- "This sort of research is important but it's only a piece of the puzzle. Yes, an organization has to know what messages are being communicated about it, whether those messages originate with the organization, the press, customers, employees, or a range of opinion leaders. Research to evaluate media coverage is important to both issues & reputation management &, therefore, to planning the organization's own, proactive, communication program & strategies.

"While the media is an important public, other publics are more important to an organization's **long-term** success. Cultivating beneficial relationships with customers, employees, distributors, suppliers, gov't, industry & community leaders is crucial. Continuing, primary research to evaluate those relationships is more important to the organization in the long haul. In the process, the relationship research can assess the impact of the media coverage. And isn't that a primary reason for analyzing the media coverage?"

-- Kitty Ward, pres, K. Ladd Ward & Co. (Hingham, Mass)

- "It's no different from an executive gathering information to make any business decision; that executive needs all the facts & information to make an informed decision. Data on reporters & media organizations can help the public relations executive assess whether there is risk in talking with a specific reporter, & provide information in which to plan for the interview. We research our public & the issues, why shouldn't we research the media. **It's typical media whining. We're playing by their rules & they don't like it.**"

-- David Hakensen, dir media rels, Padilla Speer Beardsley (Mpls)

PROBLEM: EXAGGERATED CRITICISM OF PR HOLDS SOME TRUTH

As professionals, it's important not to just groan at the sight of John Stauber's & Sheldon Rampton's book, *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies & the Public Relations Industry* (Common Courage Press, Monroe, Me). Practitioners must keep an eye on the negative side of pr (which the authors dig into in great detail) to avoid being part of the problem. And to root out damaging practices when confronted with them.

Stauber & Rampton, however, look at the negative aspects of pr as tho that were all there is. Only a paragraph or two acknowledge that

"this book doesn't tell the 'whole story' about public relations.... The techniques of public relations are not all inherently bad.... But positive uses of pr do not in any way mitigate the undemocratic power of the multi-billion dollar pr industry to manipulate & propagandize on behalf of wealthy special interests, dominating debate, discussion & decisionmaking..."

"We consider it an illusion to imagine that pr is a 'neutral' technology that can simply be adopted uncritically to achieve socially responsible ends."

Longtime use of pr by savvy activists like The Sierra Club or Ralph Nader and service organizations like the Red Cross or United Way quickly negate that idea. To say nothing of school & university pr, healthcare pr, etc.

One reason to take Stauber seriously: his predecessor critic of pr, Marvin Olasky of U.Texas, is now an advisor to Newt Gingrich. Stauber's book is being featured right at the cash register in some stores.

QUERIES RAISED BY THIS BOOK:

Have we gained awareness of how pr works for the common good? That pr seeks to build relationships based on trust & grounded in truth -- for mutual benefit? Do most practitioners look beyond the programs they put in place, making sure the ends (what the organization hopes to gain) justify the means -- & serve the public interest?

Book's central criticism is of propaganda-for-hire, disinformation tactics organizations with money can buy. Some, if true, are disgusting -- like the use of a spy to infiltrate offices of authors whose books opposed certain industries, in order to spoil book tours & broadcast media appearances. Many companies, people & pr firms are named, & their tactics illustrated. Some do appear not to pass the ethics test. Does PRSA's code enforcement board have a copy, & ethics bodies in other organizations?



Book quotes Bernays: "When the profession of public relations was first outlined, it was envisioned as other professions functioned: that is, as an art applied to a science, in this case social science, and in which the primary motivation was the public interest & not pecuniary motivation.... No reputable public relations organization would today accept a cigarette account, since their cancer-causing effects have been proved."

In fact, only 9 of 38 firms surveyed in '94 would decline a contract to represent the tobacco industry, notes the book.

ANTIDOTE: TRUST AS THE BASIC GOAL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

"PR counselors must ensure the messages we create, package & target are efficient & cost effective, but that they must also be believable. This requires that the images we engineer reflect the reality of our clients' existence. That we reject the deliberate fabrication because bogus images pollute the public mind & do not serve the public interest, and ultimately undermine the trust we seek.... The essential ingredient underlying any successful relationship is trust," Thomas Collins, mpa, Mobil Oil, told PR Ass'n of Indonesia's annual meeting.

In a letter to prr he adds: "Every time pr counselors acquiesce with the creation of phony images & manufactured sentiment unrelated to the facts of the client's operations, just for short term manipulation of public opinion, there are a cascade of interlocking consequences."

CASE STUDY He offers this illustration of community-trust building from his experience working to build relationships in neighborhoods surrounding Mobil's refineries:

A crisis of confidence existed in one town that was so bad "the very existence of our refinery was in doubt.... No matter what we said or did our neighbors simply did not believe us." Management then decided a business imperative was to build community trust. Vincent Covello (Columbia U School of Public Health) who has studied how to communicate the factors of risk, helped them understand how to achieve it. Covello's approach:

a) accept & involve the public as partner; b) different goals, audiences & media require different strategies; c) listen to the audience; d) be honest & open; e) coordinate & collaborate with other credible sources; f) meet media's needs; g) speak clearly & with compassion. "This formula was simple, easy & direct. And it worked. In a few months, & finally in the years since, we now have excellent relations with our neighbors & have so much trust that our neighbors eagerly participate in the variety of community interactions we support."

REPUTATION MANAGEMENT TOUGHER IN A CHANGING WORLD

Reputations are far more difficult to assure now that they're increasingly important, Jim Morice of Fleishman Hillard told PRSA. Reasons:

- An era of disposable companies, with weakened ties between them & individuals, which no longer hold the key to upward mobility;

- Executives & practitioners inherit modes of thought & attitudes from predecessors, and sometimes act as if today's world bears more resemblance to 1955 than it does;
- Our changed world is characterized by a) erosion of brand loyalty, b) slow growth of salaries, c) increased use of temporary workers ("a way of putting pressure on full time employees") & d) explosion of choices in the marketplace (supermarkets have 30,000 new brands each year).

10 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS / REPUTATION MANAGERS:

1. We cannot turn back the clock (tho some will try)
2. Reputation management today is different but no less important
3. We can't keep everyone happy all the time & need to be prepared to make the hard choices & know which groups really matter
4. Building a strong reputation with one group doesn't extend to others
5. To add value, pr people need to know who their "must win" groups are & how to push their hot buttons
6. Controversies cannot always be avoided
7. Crisis management is increasingly important
8. While messages must be communicated differently to different groups, the message itself must be consistent
9. Communications must be clearly tied to business goals and be measurable
10. Successful organizations have communications that drive corporate strategy to manage outcomes.

He added that strategic philanthropy is key.

SITUATION AIDS ACTIVISTS

Morice said the Christian right is "essentially doing direct response" & setting the model for the activist community. Activists today see few win-win situations, he feels. As lines harden, gov't runs out of money & institutions are increasingly "frayed & disposable," activists take charge as most of us suffer from "demo-sclerosis."

HIS ADVICE TO PRACTITIONERS

- 1) Don't overreact if you're attacked.
- 2) Don't assume you're actually being hurt.
- 3) Watch sales trends closely & do research to see if attacker's message is getting through.
- 4) If it isn't, you may be helping the attacker by joining the debate.

Having a good reputation returns benefits if organizations can differentiate themselves effectively. "Not every company can be Ben & Jerry's... but companies must nevertheless differentiate themselves."

FLAP OVER DOE'S USE OF MEDIA ANALYSIS SEEN AS DUMB

- "I believe the news media are simply another public, another audience, & that when we treat them as such, our priorities as pr professionals fall into place. We must find the most effective way to communicate with them, just as we would for other audiences, & we should at least be