

accustomed to living color & graphic effects in print, on computer screens, in video & movies, that Web pages will feel old-fashioned until they can give us instant access to such material. (Detailed description from [pr](#))

## ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **One practical impact of millenarianism** ([pr](#) last week) is pointed out by Australian film director Baz Luhrmann, whose 90s version of *Romeo & Juliet* is among several Shakespeare movies now playing. To say nothing of the Jane Austen revival. Asked by Newsweek why classics should be so popular now, he responds: "When you get to a time of change -- moving toward the millennium -- people start to look for those things that have a universal center. And they say, 'What does it mean to us now?'" Proof: the last 2 Bard revivals/revisions came during WWII & the late 60s-early 70s -- times of immense change.

¶ **Last word on the presidential election** may be this from a letter to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "Here is an explanation of why many are voting for Clinton. They are voting against the NRA, the *American Spectator*, the militia movement, Liddy & Limbaugh, the Klan, the religious far right & other extremists. Character flaws are less disturbing than hate groups!" Corporations who give large PAC donations to candidates allied with such views -- the majority of biz PAC dollars go there -- might want to be more careful of the company they keep. As always, it's our friends who do us in. Being "pro-business" isn't enough.

¶ **Unexpected example of info mapping** is found at Pioneer Balloon Co (Wichita). Its employee phone directory is done alphabetically by *first name*. Makes sense. When we want to call someone, we don't think "call Johnson" but rather "call Pete." And, how often can we absolutely not remember Pete's (or Mary's or Tom's) surname!?

¶ **US Postal Service claims direct mail gets more attention** than ads on radio or tv, where "about half go unnoticed." No argument there. Half may be in fact an exaggeration. But USPS ads claim "73.4% of all direct mail is looked at or read." Those weasel words "looked at" may be the key, 'cuz you have to look at mail even to toss it out. Or are people more conscientious about opening DM than conventional wisdom has it? "After all, who ignores their mail?" asks the ad. Still, research reports *response* to mail campaigns is falling fast ([pr](#) 4/15/96). Yet another media conundrum for practitioners to sort out.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**HONORS.** [Ken Trester](#) (dir, planning & mktg, U Mich Medical Ctr, Ann Arbor) receives the Frank J. Weaver Lifetime Achievement Award from PRSA Health Academy.

[Kyla Thompson](#) (The Jefferson Group West, Denver) receives the Swede Johnson Lifetime Achievement Award from PRSA/Colorado

## NEWS COUNCIL FINDS COVERAGE "UNTRUTHFUL," BUT WINS EMMY

That's the epitome of the state of journalism today. Northwest Airlines charged WCCO-TV (Mpls) with "distorted" investigative reporting. Rather than going thru legal channels, both agreed to resolve the dispute thru the Minnesota News Council -- a court of public opinion.

**THE COUNCIL** A balanced body -- 12 journalists & 12 community representatives. Chair is always a Supreme Court justice. "In order to have a hearing, the complainant must agree not to sue regardless of the outcome," Ann Barkelew, svp, Fleishman-Hillard & a council member, told [pr](#).

3 questions were deliberated on October 18: 1) "Did WCCO-TV paint a distorted, untruthful picture of Northwest Airlines?" 2) "Should promotional announcements for news be held to the same standards as news?" 3) If "yes," then "Did WCCO-TV's promos paint a distorted, untruthful picture of Northwest Airlines?"

**THE PROCESS** Each side is allowed a maximum of 10 minutes to make its case on each of the questions. Then no more than 40 minutes worth of questions & answers from the 24 council members follows. Case was free & open to the public, tho seating was limited to 150 including the News Council's video crew, crews from channels 2, 5, 9 & 11, print reporters & a crew from "60 Minutes."

**THE OUTCOME** 1) A vote of 19-2, with 1 abstention, resolved the first question: WCCO *did* paint a distorted, untruthful picture of Northwest Airlines. 2) Council said, Yes, promos for news *should* be held to the same standard as the news itself, by a vote of 14-5 with 2 abstentions. 3) By 18-1, with 3 abstentions, the council agreed that WCCO's promos for the story also conveyed a distorted, untruthful picture.

Tho the council's decision carries no legal weight, considering the attention it received "it was a damning verdict & a professional embarrassment for WCCO," writes Brian Lambert in the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

**IRONY** The following evening, WCCO won an Emmy award for this investigative series. It shows, editorial writer D.J. Tice notes, that "the sensational expose, regardless of how inadequately the evidence offered supports the accusations made, remains a highly esteemed style in television news."



"As I heard it, the News Council was saying, 'We have a new era here. We are not dealing with the standards of the industry. We are dealing with public standards, which **no longer tolerate this kind of work,**'" explains Bill Babcock, U Minn journalism professor & dir of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics & Law.

#### WHAT IS THE MINN. NEWS COUNCIL?

It's an independent, nonprofit agency that processes complaints against the news media thru public hearings. Some facts:

- 2000 complaints have been filed in the Council's 25 years. Most are dropped or settled after Council-initiated discussion. 116 have gone to hearings. Close to half have been decided in the media's favor.
- Other news councils are in Honolulu & a panel that covers Oregon & Washington. A national news council operated from '72 to '82 but died because the major newspapers & networks failed to support it.

"We exert a moral influence on media behavior," explains its literature. "The News Council serves, most of all, an idea: Fairness. We do not describe ourselves, or function, as a watchdog. We are a facilitator. Because the power of the press is so great, we work to create a level playing field, by getting a news outlet to come to the table as an equal with a member of the public who wants to air a complaint."

#### MEDIA TRENDS THAT BRING COMPLAINTS TO THE NEWS COUNCIL:

1. Beyond errors of fact, too many news stories omit context, creating misleading & often damaging impressions.
2. Competitive pressures cause news org'ns to **emphasize the marketing of news, rather than content & high standards.** They compete by catering to short attention spans, reinforcing them with ever shorter stories that lack context & trivialize the media's stated mission of public service.
3. Media's **lack of knowledge & understanding of new cultures** tends to reinforce the marginalization of such groups.
4. The growing conglomeration of media ownership presents higher risks of **conflicts of interests in news coverage** of business.

"It's a media accountability group that Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* thinks is incredible & should be replicated all over the country," notes Barkelew. *60 Minutes* covered the hearing & will feature it within a broader story on media accountability.

#### ELECTRONIC EMPLOYEE NEWS DISTRIBUTION FILLS VITAL NICHE

When you have 10,000 employees working in 2,200 facilities across 43 square miles, how to reach them? Responding to a reader's lament (pr 10/21)

about Los Alamos Nat'l Lab discontinuing its employee print publication, dpa Scott Duncan gives this rationale:

1. "Due to **great physical separation** & the fact that in employee survey after survey, they have asked us to communicate with them **before they read news in the local paper**, electronic news is about the only way we know to solve the problem. So...we are responding to the vast majority of our employee audience who want news now, not tomorrow.
2. "We have 2 other print products which employees can read at their leisure.... Thus we are giving employees **a variety of publications, news channels & formats** from which to gain information about the company, its products, programs & policies.
3. "Change is always difficult. But the demographics of our audience indicate the **desire for rapid dissemination of content-laden news.** This is what electronic distribution gives us.
4. "With some **7,500 'hits' on the system each week**, we believe we're on the right track.
5. "If we could give employees information via **interpersonal communication, supplemented by a variety of distribution channels** such as the web and the print publications, then we'd be doing about as much as we know how in keeping our folks well informed.
6. "The rest is up to them. **We need to have employees who also act as responsible consumers of information.** That may take more time than perfecting the computer systems we're using today."

#### HERE'S THE BOOSTER THE WEB NEEDS: CABLE ACCESS

Barrier now is the crawling pace, even with a 28.8 modem or ISDN. Cable modems deliver *10 million bits* per second, 350x faster than a standard telephone modem. Jones Intercable is testing the system in Alexandria, Va, and prr was given a preview at the company's Denver hq.

Special equipment is provided as part of the monthly fee -- some may find it high at \$40, but time will reduce that -- which is added to your cable bill as another option. To get going, just turn on the set -- as with tv. No dialing, no phone call. The system is always up & running. When fully operational, typical 2-way interactive use will be available thruout the city.

#### GREAT DESIGN IN FULL COLOR

Even more impressive than the speed is the design of the Web site -- which the company plans to have for each city in which it operates. News, local info, shopping etc are presented on your tv screen thru a 3-D representation of the view down actual streets in the town. You can literally "walk the city" -- move down the streets in the program -- via your modem & tv.

This is possible on other modems, but the time required to bring in color pix & related elements would make it painful to use. We're so