

MEDIA SELF-VIEW IS THAT THEY'RE POWERFUL MOTIVATORS

Research & experience show news media cannot motivate behavior on important decisions -- at least not by themselves (except for about 2% of any public, known as innovators). Nor can impersonal, 1-way communication build relationships -- which require face-to-face mutual exposure. But here's what a media group's annual report claims:

The company is said to be in the "people business" -- described as "what television broadcasting & newspaper publishing is all about. Developing one-on-one relationships is our company's strength. Building relationships is where we excel.

"We develop one-on-one relationships with our viewers & readers. These relationships make us a part of their daily lives. We strive to be a member of every family in our markets. We provide local news, weather, sports & other pertinent information that families use to make daily decisions. These decisions affect many facets of daily life including: *how children dress for school, where families go for recreation, where people worship, where people shop, what people read, how they vote, where they search for jobs, where they seek medical attention, how people spend & save their money, and even when farmers plant their crops.*"

IS THIS TRUE & THE RESEARCH WRONG?

First, check the list for the way media may influence decisions organizations & their pr staffs are trying to motivate:

1. **The topics described are directional rather than decisional.** People have already decided to undertake these behaviors & media can help direct them to a specific place or item. This is awareness or reinforcement (re-awareness) -- which research finds to be the major capability of media. That's where it is useful to pr.

Media may help us decide "where to" or "how to" carry out some behavior we've already determined we want to do -- like a directory. This is why many are worried on-line data services may replace media (see p. 2).

2. **Motivating behavior would require** getting people who otherwise wouldn't vote to get themselves to the polls. Or stimulating people who aren't seeking needed medical attention to do so.

This is what practitioners most often are attempting: to stimulate people to do something they hadn't planned on doing.

- Info from media may bring a voter who's lukewarm to the polls in order to vote for (or against) some candidate that particularly got his attention; yet an endorsement for a candidate by the medium typically has little impact.
- Info may drive someone who's worried about a health problem to look into a new cure; or show them they have a health problem.

It's a question of whether these behaviors can be stimulated by information -- and research shows that, by itself, info is a weak stimulator.

TV NEWS LOSING VIEWERS AS MEDIA REACH CONTINUES DECLINE

Less than half the public (42%) regularly watches the 3 nightly network newscasts (down from 48% in '95, 60% in '93), finds a recent survey by the Pew Research Ctr. Datapoints:

- Regular viewing of local tv news is considerably higher (65%) than network news viewership, tho it's also down from '95 (72%).
- Percentage who listen to radio news is largely unchanged. 44% said they listened to news on the radio "yesterday" vs. 42% in '95. 13% report they are regular Nat'l Public Radio listeners, compared to 15% in '95.
- 50% say they read a newspaper "yesterday" -- comparable to June '95 (52%) & higher than March '95 during the O.J. Simpson trial (45%).
- 59% watched tv news "yesterday" -- down from a high of 74% in '94.
- The Wall Street Journal received the highest credibility evaluation of any print medium tested. Print ratings continue to lag behind those achieved by the tv networks, for the most part.

	Believe			Cannot Believe	Never Heard of
1996	4	3	2	1	
Wall St Journal	28	29	13	7	3
Your daily paper	24	37	26	8	-
USA Today	20	34	20	9	3
Associated Press	14	40	22	9	3
NYTimes, WashPost & LATimes	14	36	18	10	3
CNN	34	37	14	4	1
ABC News	30	44	17	5	-
CBS News	30	42	17	6	-
NBC News	28	46	18	5	-
Dan Rather	29	39	18	8	1
Tom Brokaw	29	37	18	7	2
Peter Jennings	27	37	18	8	2
Bernard Shaw	9	22	16	10	18
Christian Broadcasting Network	20	18	21	13	6
C-SPAN	19	24	12	9	10
Larry King	9	21	28	21	4
Rush Limbaugh	8	15	25	42	3



Survey points up 3 trends in the declining viewership of tv news:

1. "Younger people are turning away from tv news in greater numbers than older people."
2. "The rate of tv news audience falloff among those who use computers appears greater than among those who don't." [Are they getting their info from the Internet, or just preoccupied surfing the Web?]
3. "Lack of time is the top reason given for watching less tv news, & it's offered much more often by young people than by older people."

This doesn't tell what **opinion leaders read, watch or listen to**. Most often they're the only ones who matter. Assumedly NPR & CNN are their choices. Neither rated highly, e.g. number who "never heard of" Bernard Shaw. And note Rush Limbaugh's credibility score.

(More from Pew Research Ctr, 1875 Eye st. NW, Wash DC 20006; 202/293-3126)

NEWSPAPER EXECS SAY BIGGEST WOE IS DECLINING READERSHIP

Declining readership (64%) remains the top problem facing newspapers, finds 3rd annual State of the Newspaper Industry study. Other problems include:

Increased competition for ad dollars (59%); declining readership of young people (58%); increasing competition for readers' time (51%); quality of content (51%); declining readership by women (39%); low public credibility (30%); cost of production, including newsprint (29%); growth of the Internet (26%). Not a healthy picture, reducing media value to pr still more.

- **Ambivalent about on-line services:** 45% of newspaper execs say on-line services will hurt newspapers in the long term; 44% say it will help them. 43% have some presence online, but only 10% of them are currently making a profit on these projects.
- **Ambivalent about their future.** 52% say the industry will be "healthy" 10 yrs from now. That percentage didn't drop from '95-'96 as it did from '94-'95 (then falling from 63% to 52%). But 48% say the industry will be in worse shape 10 yrs from now.
- **Critical of present-day journalism.** Fewer than 1 in 10 feel media is doing an excellent job of covering the presidential campaign. And they say their own newspapers aren't doing any better. Top reasons for this: 83% say media focus too much on the "horse race" aspects of the campaign; 41% say media are not covering national issues important in the campaign. On a scale from 1-10 (1 being very poor & 10 excellent), they rate campaign coverage in general between 5 & 6 -- fairly mediocre. They give their own newspapers about the same rating.

Study was conducted by American Opinion Research in cooperation with the Foundation for American Communications & sponsored by Hearst Newspapers. Questionnaires were mailed to 1,200 newspaper publishers, adv'g & mktg dirs & editors across the US. 888 execs participated. (More info from AOR, 707 State rd, Princeton, NJ 08540; 609/683-4860)

COMPARATIVE STUDY FINDS PR MORE POTENT THAN PRODUCT ADS

Walt Lindenmann (Ketchum PR, NYC) had a client who wanted to determine which is more effective in promoting a new product -- public relations alone, adv'g alone, or pr & adv'g together. What Lindenmann did:

1. Identified 4 comparable communities in 4 different sections of the country. Then conducted 250 phone interviews in each of the 4 communities to determine familiarity, attitude & behavior levels relating to the company, its products & services.
2. Introduced the new product using pr techniques in the first community; adv'g techniques in the 2nd; pr & adv'g techniques in the 3rd; no pr or adv'g in the 4th.
3. After product intros, identical follow-up phone interviews were conducted -- 250 per community. Respondents were probed to determine familiarity, attitude & behavior levels relating to the company, its products & services.
4. Compared data from the pre- & post-interviews in all four communities to determine which of the different approaches was most effective.
5. **Most effective was the introduction using pr only.** Next was the mix of pr & adv'g. In third place, the use of adv'g only. Least effective, predictably, was the intro that used no pr or adv'g support.

He admonishes: "Keep in mind, results can change depending on the product, on the community, on the types of pr & adv'g techniques utilized."

(More from Lindenmann at 220 East 42nd st, NYC 10017; 212/878-4600)

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

Put initial caps on *Internet* and *World Wide Web*, say managing editors of both AP & UPI Stylebooks. AP does it "simply because usage had been determined before we put it in the book." UPI's reasoning: the words are proper names.

How -- & Why -- to Influence Public Policy: An Action Guide For Community Organizations taps the knowledge of dozens of community activists, national advocates & legal experts on what to do in response to the many drastic cuts in programs for low-income people & communities. "The message is clear: big cuts -- along with other profound changes in low-income programs -- are coming. We had better be prepared. And we had better figure out why programs for low-income people have fared so poorly ... and what we can do about that," notes the Guide. Looks at techniques for influencing policymakers, how to register & educate voters & get them to the polls, how to influence administrative agencies, how to lobby without violating the law, & more. (\$5, 40 pgs, from the Center for Community Change, 1000 Wisconsin av NW, DC 20007, 202/342-0567)