

Trend that May Affect PR? Price Waterhouse reports organizations are using more in-house lawyers and cutting the high cost of outside counsel. In a survey, only 4% expected an increase in in-house attorneys. Most talk in pr circles seems to be the opposite -- cutting staff & outsourcing.

Printed calendars are still a useful business tool. Nearly all business people (97%) use a calendar on a regular basis, finds a survey by Calendar Adv'g Council. 72% use a printed calendar 5+ times/day; 40% use it 10+ times daily. In addition, 37% own & use 3 or more calendars. Promotional calendars are used by 55%. Of them, 8 in 10 can recall the name of the advertiser & 2 of 3 do business with the advertiser. Most useful types of calendars to business people are those with one month on a page (63%) & weekly planners or appointment calendars to track daily activities (62%). 47% of those who do not have a promotional calendar would be interested in receiving one. 101 business people participated in this phone survey.

International Ass'n of Public Participation Practitioners (IAP3) will hold its 5th international conference Aug 24-28 at the Colorado Convention Center. (See this week's t&t for a look at public participation.) Four conference tracks include: 1) ethics & values guiding the public participation profession; 2) changes in values, priorities & needs; 3) design of more effective involvement processes, new techniques & technologies; 4) creation of sustainable communities. (More info from 1-800-644-4273, or visit <http://www.transport.com/~pin/iap3.html> -- IAP3's web site)

REAL DANGER: "AMERICA IS BECOMING A FRACTURED SOCIETY"

"A house divided -- by race, culture, ethnicity, gender, class & age," notes Paul Alvarez (Ketchum Com'ns) in the '96 Schranz Distinguished Lectureship in Public Relations. While we pride ourselves on our diversity, "America is heading to a destiny beyond diversity. We are in danger of moving toward serious, potentially violent social divisions." His reasoning:

- "Modern communications techniques & technologies are, to a certain extent, responsible for this division -- at the very least, they are widening the fissures, rather than healing them."
- "You can see what's happening. Everyone will have his own tv, watch his own segmented programming, read his own special-interest newsletters & magazines, & 'chat' on the computer with like-minded hackers. On the one hand, it's an exhilarating prospect -- an unprecedented personal freedom. But it also poses a risk -- an isolation of thought & experience that ultimately threatens the American dialogue."
- "Technology is leading us to what the former head of NBC calls the 'electronic republic.' People will rely less on their elected representatives & 'vote' virtually instantly thru polls & computer-enhanced pressure groups. With no media elite to act as gatekeeper, public passion & mis-information can spread with the speed of light." (Copy of speech from Mel Sharpe, dep't of journalism, Ball State U, Muncie, IN 47306-0485)

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STRATEGY NOW: PEOPLE WANT TO BE SERVED, NOT SOLD; INVOLVED, NOT TOLD

This issue marks the 20th anniversary of prr's editorship by Pat Jackson & Otto Lerbinger. Over this period, the most significant change in the field of public relations -- tho there have been many -- is in the strategies brought to bear on pr situations. And the increasing primacy of strategy as the major skill required of practitioners.

20 YEARS AGO, THE EMPHASIS WAS ON TACTICS

The overwhelming majority of practitioners followed one prescribed strategy: mass audience publicity & promotion. PR had a blinding love affair with mass media. Tho few would have been able to recite it, the Domino Theory (as enunciated by the academics) prevailed:

- Mass communicate **information** far & wide
- This forces people to form an **opinion** about it
- After an opinion forms several times, it hardens into an **attitude**
- It is attitude that drives **behavior**

- **The glitch** was already then being pointed out by the Behaviorist Psychologists: behavior is situational, does not necessarily spring from attitude -- & people rationalize attitudes to explain behavior.
- **The skills** that brought success were 1) creativity, the ability to come up with ideas or events that grabbed the interest of media & their audiences; and 2) media knowledge in order to place stories.
- **Other types of practitioners** were secondary. Those who worked on issues were trying to make public affairs a separate field, witness the Public Affairs Council. Consumer affairs folks followed this lead with SOCAP (Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals). Internal communicators were a vaguely inferior breed. When the industrial editors groups asked to merge into PRSA a few years earlier, they received a haughty rebuff -- but got more than even by then forming IABC.

It's clear now that the field lost mightily in being so devoted to media placement that key elements fell away, established their own career paths & organizations -- and began avoiding the term public relations.

THE ENVIRONMENT CHANGES

Mass media proved to be its own executioner, as rampant overcommunication made it & related 1-way media ineffective. Breaking thru the clutter became the hard part, & remains so. None of the many other changes have been as profound.



STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW CENTURY**1. Building relationships face-to-face** by supertargeting opinion & power leaders is dominant among practice leaders. Relationships provide the access communications can't. Earning trust thru relationships motivates behavior. Ironically, when a relationship is formed, people will actually accept & pay some heed to your communications.

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2. Making internal publics top priority seems universal now: inreach before outreach. If they're not working as teams, productivity & cost competitiveness won't be achieved. Only satisfied employees can deliver customer delight.

- And now internal publics are seen as the basic vehicle for marketing, community relations, issue campaigns, gov't relations. Ambassador, constituency relations & volunteer programs; issue anticipation & political action teams are the tactical results.
- Probably the most widespread activity currently is establishing face-to-face internal communications activities -- meeting cascades, team leader as primary communicator, spotlighting frontline supervisors. *This is the revolution in achieving effectiveness -- not the many programmatic, flavor-of-the-month fads management has saddled organizations with.*

3. Under-the-radar approach to media proliferates as journalists are forced by marketing pressures to become entertainment-oriented voyeurs, and media credibility & reach continue to decline. A summary of several approaches might be:

- Media can't do your job for you. Rarely can they help, even if disposed to do so. They can hurt, because in skeptical times it's easy to sow doubt & bad news travels the grapevine fast.
- But pr is responsible for meeting its goals whatever they do -- so go direct to key stakeholders, and don't make yourself overly visible since that may attract media snooping.

4. Accountable, focused, measurable programs -- call them hard-headed or realistic -- are making activities viewed by unenlightened managers as "soft" into value-adding efforts. Beyond the internal perception, external stakeholders do respond better when they understand there's expectations on both sides. The former giveaway, "we're just nice people" approach never jibed with other organizational behaviors & was not trusted.

- Strategic philanthropy, value-added & cause-related marketing, and loyalty programs are prominent examples.

5. Research -- far beyond statistical surveys -- has gone beyond lip-service to be the backbone of programming & strategy-setting. Top techniques are participative: focus groups, panels, delphi studies, gap research.

Involving stakeholders & offering them service info or events is the key.

TITLES PORTRAY EVOLUTION OF THE FIELD

1. Originally, we were *public information officers*, with responsibility for what the title denotes.
2. Recognizing that 1-way info transfer was insufficient, we became *public relations* practitioners to pursue the ideal of 2-way dialogue. Some became *public affairs* officers. But little changed. Mass media & fending off adversaries as summarily as possible were still the objectives.
3. With the New American Revolution of the 60s, people demanded a voice in decisions that affected them. Open meeting/Right-to-know statutes & Nat'l Environmental Policy Act of '74 wrote *public participation* -- with its formal hearing cycles & mandated data sharing -- into law. This led to jobs with the public participation title, principally in gov't.
4. As mandated participation formats became charades -- basically a venue for zealots & cranks -- and overcommunication & overbusyness pulled people away from working on even the issues they cared about, a new strategy became necessary. *Stakeholder involvement* proactively reaches out to involve the opinion leaders in key stakeholder groups. The difference between "public" & "stakeholder" is as profound here as the difference between "participation" & "involvement."

FUND RAISERS WILL SELL & PUT YOUR NAME ON EVERYTHING TODAY

Ann & Graham Gund endowed the **directorship** -- i.e. CEO's job -- of Boston's Museum of Fine arts with a capital campaign gift. So Malcolm Rogers, the director, isn't known by his title -- but as "Ann & Graham Gund Director."

"It's a naming opportunity," Tracy Phillips of the pr dep't told prr. "We're running a \$110 million capital campaign. The Gunds gave a gift which they asked to be put toward endowing the directorship of the museum. A goal of the campaign was to make sure we could endow the directorship. So it's an endowed position now, the name will be there always." Previously he was just "director." Just like putting your name on a building or a room.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

Technique to Make Work Group Meetings Effective is for the team leader to ask at each weekly get together, "What are the rumors out there?" The leader can then respond to them, & others can chip in their knowledge of either the rumor or the answer. In addition to providing some control over the rumor mill, this sends a clear signal not to be taken in by rumors -- since the leader is a handy source of verification. It also makes the meetings interesting & allows information to be shared on topics the leader and/or management might not even know were on employees' agendas. A good technique for practitioners to add to training agendas about holding better meetings.