

40th Anniversary Issue (1958-1998) & 30th Survey of the Profession, Part I **TECHNOLOGY IS LEADING PR TREND, BUT IMPACT & VALUE MIXED**

Not surprisingly, the leading trend practitioners are personally experiencing in their work is the impact of technology -- databases, the Internet, intranet, e-mail. But verbatim make it plain their effectiveness is mixed.

TABLE 1: TRENDS IN THE PROFESSION

	<u>% of Respondents</u>
Impact of Technology	28%
PR, A Strategic, Relationship-Building Function	20
Changing Media Role & Strategy	12
Staffing/Outsourcing/Downsizing PR Departments	12
Blurring Of Lines Between All Com'ns Functions	10
Importance of Internal Relations/Communications	6
Use of 1-On-1 & Face-To-Face	4
More demanding/Fragmented/Distrustful Public	3
Globalization/International Activities/Multicultural	3
Targeted or Database Marketing	3
Strategic Alliances/Coalitions	3
Research/Evaluation & Measurement	3
Speed of Communications	2
Denial of Need To Change Traditional Methods	1
Information Mapping	1
Information Overload	1
Customer Relations/Satisfaction	1
Others: Concern for Community, More Women Than Men In Field, Reputation Mgmt, Lack of Ethics, etc.	27

*Due to multiple responses, total is more than 100%

COMMENTS ON TECHNOLOGY ARE INSTRUCTIVE:

- "Move to technology is eliminating printed matter" (bank vp)
- "Impact of technology/Internet & segmentation leading to speed without analysis, data without wise interpretation" (CEO of a pr firm)
- "Move to Internet for direct info, not media" (com'ns specialist in state gov't)
- "Confusion with 'technology' & 'communications'" (head of dep't at a trade ass'n)
- "Diminishing returns of going electronic -- everyone prints everything out anyway" (prof'l ass'n vp)
- "Confusion over effectiveness of technology-driven messages" (higher education vp)
- "Reliance on electronic communication for worldwide involvement" (self-employed consultant)



SECOND AMONG THE TRENDS is the view by practitioners, & people outside the profession, of pr as a strategic, relationship-building function:

- "The trend to be more strategic & relationship-building rather than just mass info dispensers" (supvr/mgr of a unit at a utility)
- "Linking pr in a more concrete, measurable way to the organization's strategic goals" (dir of a nonprofit)
- "More focus on use of pr to support strategic goals" (dir/head of dep't at a healthcare org'n)
- "Move from tactical to strategic" (supvr/mgr of unit of an industrial co)
- "Greater awareness of value of communications by sr mgmt" (Canadian self-employed consultant)
- "Increased recognition of com'n planning & issue mgmt by people outside the profession" (CEO of Canadian pr firm)
- "ROI emphasis" (dir/head of dep't at a midwestern healthcare org'n)
- "Move to behavioral pr -- relationship building" (educator)

In the midst of this awareness about the profession, are the continuing laments that others just don't understand pr's value:

- "Increased need to promote internally what I do behind the scenes" (vp consumer product company)
- "Too little understanding of how good pr affects the bottomline" (vp/sr counsel of a pr firm)
- "Increased pr whining about getting 'no respect'" (head of dep't at an industrial company)

TIED AS THIRD CURRENT TREND at 12% of respondents are a) changing media role & strategy and b) staffing/outsourcing/downsizing of pr dep'ts.
Verbatim:

Media

- "Disintegrating power of mass media" (supvr/mgr of unit, state gov't)
- "Dumbing down of media" (vp, consumer product company)
- "Self destruction of news media, loss of credibility, shift toward entertainment" (self-employed consultant)
- "Increased commercial interference on the editorial process" (CEO of pr firm)
- "Less use of media, more direct communication" (pr firm CEO)
- "Need to operate under media's radar & go directly to stakeholders" (school com'ns dir)
- "Less attention to mass media sources (unless it's a murder)" (dir of a nonprofit)

PR staffing

- "Inexperienced newcomers to the industry, no ethics" (exec vp of an ad agency/pr section)
- "Finding qualified people" (supvr/mgr of unit, consumer product company)
- "Scarcity of practitioners who can write effectively" (dep't head at a publicly held oil/gas exploration & production company)
- "Increased 'feeling of entitlement' in entry-level positions" (supvr/mgr of unit at a nonprofit)

- "Inexperienced/non-professional staff filling pr positions" (CEO of a Canadian pr firm)
- "Continual squeeze on consultants as companies downsize & outsource" (svp, pr firm)
- "More responsibilities without increased staff or money" (supvr/mgr of unit at a healthcare org'n)

TECHNOLOGY IS THE LEADING TREND IN ALL BUT FOUR INDUSTRIES (where it came in 2nd in all but one -- insurance, where it ranked 5th):

1. **media** practitioners say *blurring of lines between com'ns functions*
2. **educators** put *downsizing/job elimination* first
3. **utilities** also lead with *blurring of lines between com'ns functions*
4. **insurance** rates *importance of internal rels; blurring of lines between com'ns functions; use of 1-on-1 & strategic alliances/coalitions*

SOME CURIOUS FINDINGS ABOUT FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITIES

With all the emphasis in every quarter on employee relations, it's astounding that 50% of respondents are not using face-to-face programs with Public #1. In fact, face-to-face employee programs have declined since prr's '93 survey, from 51% to 42%. (We'll probe possible reasons in coming months; readers with cases to share please call now. One plausible explanation is that mgrs or HR have assumed the lead here. Or this is so routine now that instead of asking about "programs," the question should have inquired about "process." Or, have practitioners been lulled into believing that electronic messages can replace 1-on-1?)

THE REAL NEWS IS THAT face-to-face programs are systematized by databases. In '93, 17% of face-to-face employee programs were tied to a database; today 22% are. Compared to 5 yrs ago (pr 9/27/93), databased "loyalty" marketing programs rose from 13% to 19% & customer satisfaction programs went from 31% to 41%.

TABLE 2: ONE-ON-ONE PERSONALIZED RELATIONSHIP PROGRAMS BEING USED

	Using Now %	Consid- ering %	% Tied to database?			Not Using %
			Y	N	NR	
Face-to-face employee programs	42	9	22	34	44	50
Customer satisfaction programs	41	13	47	12	41	47
Coalitions (beyond typical trade grps)	39	6	33	25	42	55
Constituency rels/ambassador prgms	38	10	47	22	31	52
Opinion leader tracking	30	14	44	24	32	56
Databased "loyalty" marketing programs	19	12	54	4	42	69

(Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%)

SOME CURRENT ONE-ON-ONE PROGRAMS RESPONDENTS ARE USING INCLUDE:

- An environmental engineering org'n uses an informal "envoy program" with key opinion leaders.
- An educator explains they do "visits to the major employers in the communities we serve."
- A federal gov't agency uses roundtable discussion groups with key audiences.
- A financial services org'n has a "weekly HOME (Hearing Opinions Motivates Employees) Day, where leaders don't have meetings so they can be with their employees."
- A consumer product & service org'n uses "ongoing client/prospect roundtables on topics of interest to key groups of buyers. Average attendance at each is 15."

ARE PRACTITIONERS STRATEGISTS OR TACTICIANS? BOTH, SURVEY FINDS

47% *often* create communications products; 45% *often* are involved in strategy, counseling & training (see Table 3). Of the 27% who *always* are involved in strategy, 75% of them *always* or *often* are involved in creating the com'ns products. While the scales are tipped slightly toward tactics, strategy isn't far behind today.

Sectors with the highest percentage of practitioners being consulted for strategy are: pr firms, ad agency/pr sections, consumer product companies, industrial companies, hospitals, schools & federal gov't.

TABLE 3: PRESENTDAY PUBLIC RELATIONS -- STRATEGY OR TACTICS?

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Seldom</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Always</u>	<u>NR</u>
Creating com'n products	0.5%	3.4%	14.7%	47.2%	32.7%	1.6%
Strategy, counseling, training	1.1	4.5	21.5	44.7	27.0	1.1

PRACTITIONERS ARE CONSULTED ON MANAGEMENT DECISIONS:

Impending crisis or issue	83%	Labor disputes	37%
New product or service	63%	Employee benefits/incentives	32%
Volunteers/contributions programs	48%	Merger/acquisition/takeover	32%
Litigation	47%	Appointments to bd of directors	32%
Downsizing or RIFs	40%	Plant closings	21%
		Product recalls	15%

Additional findings from the 30th Survey of the Profession will appear soon, including data on salaries & working conditions

MONICAGATE'S PR LESSON: HAVE A FALLOUT ISSUES STRATEGY

The ones with most to be concerned about in this scandal are the American Bar Ass'n & its local & state affiliates -- because what's being damned by *all sides* is the law & lawyers.

- **Legal haggling has demonstrated that "the truth" & legal findings of truth** are not at all the same. Everyone knew it, at some level -- but this is a triggering event for seeing the law as a sham. Following O.J., this is serious
- **Starr & his team have proven that prosecutors don't care about fairness**, as we'd all like to believe. Only about convictions. They're like a sports team that is concerned purely with winning -- except that athletes mainly play by the rules, which the special prosecutor has not done (e.g., press leaks, making grand jury testimony public, emphasizing the salacious rather than hard evidence)
- **The grand jury system is unfair** & not in accord with what most citizens believe the justice system should be. It is an unfettered fishing expedition that can delve into any topic, no matter how irrelevant to the case, in order to intimidate, embarrass & threaten. Used outside the grand jury room, these tactics would constitute a criminal offense

WHY NEITHER EXPLANATION NOR REJOINDER FROM THE LEGAL COMMUNITY ?

1. **Are they planning strategy?** (Don't wait too long or the window of opportunity will pass & anything said then will appear to be *rationalizing*. Speaking now can be *educating*)
2. **Do they want to avoid getting involved?** (With attacks hourly on the lawyers & the law, that's an ostrich approach)
3. **Do they feel it will all blow over?** (O.J. anger is still alive -- and this is at a much more visible level)
4. **Are bar ass'ns controlled by Republican partisans?** (Not that we know of -- but not coming forward may give that impression)
5. **Are they just "protecting their own" by being silent?** (Very likely, since the Reps & Senators who must dispose of the case are mainly lawyers also. And think of the large fees being earned, & in the offing)

WITH THE BAR AS MUCH UNDER ATTACK AS THE PRESIDENT, THIS IS A CASE STUDY IN STRATEGY FOR HANDLING FALLOUT ISSUES

Practitioners know better than to rush in when it will create an issue or imply linkage. Monicagate reminds us that, sometimes, getting involved is unavoidable.

- The skill is to become a *sideline teacher*, explaining what's happening & why in an objective, nonpartisan way

- That keeps your organization out of the fray
- Showing concern in this helpful manner positions you as the public's friend & servant rather than a co-defendant

EXPERIENCE TEACHES POWERPOINT & SIMILAR TOOLS ARE TRAPS

1. Overheard in the elevator of a business school. Students complaining about an important presentation they'd just given:

"It looked great in the computer. But you could hardly read it on the screen."

2. Witnessed at a high-level conference of about 30 heavy hitters: Every speaker that used computer presentations had either:
 - Trouble getting the machine started, so the meeting was delayed
 - Machine failure during the presentation so had to switch to transparencies -- except that only 1 had any, so the rest were left to their own devices
 - Unreadable slides because green on blue really can't be seen -- except in the preparation stages on the computer screen
 - Irritatingly distracting slides due to too much color or eye candy

BLACK & WHITE LIVES!

Research is clear: nothing is as readable, or stamps its content as firmly onto the brain, as black on white. Color to emphasize words, headings or single lines may be helpful to viewers.

But that's the point. Presentations must be **viewer friendly**, not show off technology. A course in basic graphic psychology seems to be needed for many speakers & presenters -- who have fallen into the Technology Trap.

pr's 40th ANNIVERSARY

40 yrs ago this week, Charles Prout was typing pr reporter on his kitchen table in Evanston, Ill (1958). He was then dpr of Mead Johnson & Co (baby formula pioneers). Today, pr reporter uses technology he probably never dreamed about. And the field encompasses strategies & tactics that have evolved & changed over those 4 decades.

No longer is pr simply 1-way publicity, promotional events & employee newsletters. The 30th Survey of the Profession in this issue is witness to the sophistication of presentday practice -- to the growing the profession has done, needs to do & continues to do. The newsletter will continue to report on cutting-edge work that will help guide the profession toward its ever-more-important role.

