

**BOTTOM LINE: THEY'RE PRIME  
OPINION LEADER CANDIDATES**

This open approach promotes better relationships, finds U. Md. psychologist Lisa Aspinwall. In a marriage – which also applies to work teams –

optimistic couples are more likely to talk about what's bothering them so it can be resolved. "They may be more confident they can solve things – but when something can't be solved, they recognize that earlier." Precisely the kind of can-do movers & shakers needed for constituency relations programs.

**ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE FOR PRACTITIONERS**

¶ **Rising Move To Evaluating PR Has Reinforced The Old News vs. Ads Struggle** – with pr claiming media coverage is more potent than advertising. Services to measure coverage, provide "ad equivalents" & other sales tactics are booming. Council of PR Firms & Institute for PR have a major study underway that will, in part, examine this claim. To learn what's really known – via systematic research – **be sure to read the Grunigs' research supplement with this issue.**

¶ **Community News Online Replaces The Throwaway "Shopper."** Everybody loves the community newspaper, that tabloid-style gazette filled with local news and lore, which arrives free to every home. Now the same format – quick & easy community news – is available on-line. That means a DC resident who happens to be a native of coastal New Hampshire can find out what's going on in her hometown by clicking a few keys. Furthermore, she can voice opinions instantaneously about whether cops should police hallways of the local high school, or whether jet skiers should be banned from the local beaches. "Streetmail" (www.streetmail.com) was started 2 years ago in western Mass by Bo Peabody, a young Cyberpreneur who of course now has millions. The service goes to 660,000 subscribers a week in 55 communities. Correspondents are being hired in regions across the country – local names that can tap into the town beat. "It's like the paper had a letters-to-the-editor section in real time & allowed you to converse with the media product," says Peabody. Could be a boon to pr trying to gain ground at the grassroots – as response has been big, and it includes frequent polls and updates of community opinions concerning regional issues.

¶ **A Skeptic In Cyber Church: Promoting, Decrying Internet Enthusiasm.** It isn't enough that e-stocks are up one day, down the next. Cyber-cynicism is also taking hold, even among Internet gurus. Tom Valvoic was for 11 years ed for *Telecommunications* magazine & a big Net enthusiast early on. But now, he's wondering what all the hype will really amount to. "The media are caught up in the Internet craze & prone to repeating a single idea: that the new technologies are going to profoundly change our lives." While this is true on the surface, he feels it has become apparent that these renditions are devoid of any specifics. "How do we get past all this hype & constantly invoked mythologies of digital processes – and into something more tangible, more grounded in day to day reality?" Valvoic's new collection of essays, *Digital Mythologies, The Hidden Complexities of the Internet*, describe the rise of the hype & survey the counter literature of skepticism that is following afterward. Valuable for practitioners looking for balance in the e-world – and especially for sparring with IT types or managers who think your Website is a silver bullet.

**WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**HONORS.** The Practitioner Merit Award from Conn. Valley/PRSA to Deb Percival (Percival Com'ns, Avon, CT) for exemplifying the highest standards & promoting a positive image

of the profession, mentoring, volunteer community service & working to educate senior mgmt on the value & benefits of pr.

**TO GET AHEAD, PR NEEDS TO THINK BIG, UNDERSTAND & TAKE SERIOUSLY THE TRUE CONCEPT OF "STRATEGY": LARRY NEWMAN**

For the profession to gain entrance to & remain ensconced in the decisionmaking tiers of an organization, practitioners must a) think big, b) understand the minds of their bosses & c) understand their organization's overall mission. That many are lacking in this regard is evident in the proliferation of "strategies," e.g., "communications strategies," "community outreach strategies," "media placement strategies" et al, says Larry Newman, pres, Newman Partnership Ltd. (Columbia, SC)

- "Strategies, whether military, foreign, political or pr, are **about changing behavior**"
- "The question for practitioners is **how do you get resources & how do you deploy them?**"

**STRATEGY VS. STRATEGEMS**

Things such as communication plans, issues framing, opinion research, community outreach programs, media placement are all "stratagems," tools used to implement the overall strategy. The reason the distinction is important, Newman told prr, is that to do its job, a pr department cannot have its own strategy. Its objective should be **to do its part toward advancing the strategy of the organization.** "A 'communications strategy' is irrelevant. What is the strategy of the organization as a whole?"

**A GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Newman devised a list of definitions to help practitioners think with precision when implementing organizational strategies. **Note especially that stakeholders/publics are seen as resources.** prr's summary of them:

1. **Resources:** Anything/one you need for your org'n to survive & grow, e.g., money, skills, knowledge, vendors, permissions (from gov't, communities), partners
2. **Competitors:** Those who a) seek the same resources you seek; b) supply a resource, now or in the future, with the same or alternative benefits, values & need/want satisfaction; c) seek your resources' support
3. **Strategic Competitive Advantage, or Driving Force:** Compelling reason to do business with you rather than a competitor; your ability to satisfy a resource better or bring more value to his/her business or personal life. "To be strategic, an advantage must be sustainable"

If you work at a company, your strategy is selling a product or service. If you're an activist, your strategy is to achieve & sustain some sort of social or behavioral change. "You can communicate – but if you can't deliver, you defeat the purpose of the organization." Newman feels "part of pr's job may be telling the CEO whether a particular product or service is even worth selling."



4. **Power:** Ability to modify conduct of others & prevent others from modifying your conduct
5. **Strategic Assets**, "Area of Excellence": Art of gaining & utilizing resources to compel behaviors which your CEO believes are necessary for your org'n to survive & grow
6. **Target:** Anyone whose behavior you seek to change or reinforce. There must be some discrete, observable, measurable action you want the target to do, not do, or let you do. Targets include resources, competitors, key actors, mavens
7. **Key Actors:** Individuals who have power relative to you or over a situation vital to your survival & growth
8. **Mavens:** *Perceived* by target as significantly knowledgeable about the pros & cons of the behavior that you want from the target
9. **Event:** A discrete, unambiguous, confirmable occurrence that makes the future different from the past
10. **Trends:** A series of economical, political, social, cultural changes or developments. "We use trends to uncover discontinuities, positive or negative"
11. **Issue:** Any trend, event or condition, internal or external, which if continued will have a significant effect on the operation of your organization during the period of its business plan. OR – a dispute between 2+ parties over public or organizational policy
12. **Strategic Issue:** Discontinuously, positively or negatively impacts the organization's power, strategic competitive advantage, or strategic assets; or those of a competitor
13. **Critical Issue:** An issue is critical if it affects life, limb, human health; enhances or retards your power, strategic advantage or strategic assets; enhances a competitor's power, strategic advantage or strategic assets; involves you in litigation, affects your financial statement; enhances or damages the organization's reputation as competent and having integrity; singles you out for unwanted attention by legislators, regulators, activists or the press. A crisis is an event which exposes you to one or more of the above
  - It's critical if it meets your criteria for a) probability; b) impact; c) time frame. The longer it takes to encourage, prepare for, or respond to a strategic issue, the more critical it becomes

#### LESSON FOR PR

**For pr educators**, remember that "strategy" is not something you teach. "Strategy is a way of thinking about issues and problems – how can you teach that? You *can* teach about thinking in a way that will influence behavior."

**For practitioners**, think strategically & think big. "Why are pr people often left out in the hallway, waiting until someone comes out of the board room & tells us what to do? It's because we're not thinking big. They think of us as mechanics. Our thinking is often too low level."

(More from Newman at 803/765-0807)

## PR PRACTITIONER / EDUCATOR / LAWYER PONDERES NEGATIVE LEGAL IMPACT OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

"If a corporation openly or tacitly admits that its public communications efforts are aimed at improving its bottom line, a court might be more open to apply the definition of commercial speech" to this activity. Commercial speech does not enjoy the full, unfettered First Amendment rights that non-commercial speech does – and therefore can be regulated or restricted, writes Erik Collins in Northwestern U's *Journal of Integrated Communication*.

As a former pr exec for Philip Morris, Collins has dealt with potential speech restrictions. Now associate dean at U of S.C., he also holds a law degree. His "admittedly speculative" case:

1. "Commercial speech has long been subject to a bewildering array of governmental rules, regulations & requirements
2. "As corp'ns adopt communications strategies leading to integration of pr, advertising & marketing com'ns functions, much of this public speech may be at risk for such legal restrictions as well"

### COORDINATION NEED OBVIOUS, BUT ...

No one disagrees that all com'n & relationship functions should speak with One Clear Voice & be coordinated. But subordinating a function like pr which deals with all stakeholders – not just customers, as marketing does – has these additional risks, Collins notes:

- **Loss of identity/status for pr** by subsuming it under marketing (even if only by implication)
- **Contributing to senior mgmt's misunderstanding of pr's role** as a technical rather than strategic management function (see lead article)

Whatever your view of IMC (or Integrated Com'ns as it's now often called), the Journal is always stimulating. Collins' article appears in the current, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue. (Copy from the Journal, 1908 Sheridan Rd, Evanston IL 60201-9824)

### ARE OPTIMISTIC PEOPLE DREAMERS – OR OPINION LEADERS?

The myth is they're Pollyannas, perhaps not bright enough to see reality, perhaps afraid to face up to bad news & not prepared for trouble. But new research in the emerging field of "positive psychology" finds they're happy & indeed more willing than pessimists to handle bad news.

Study covered 2 topics: owning up to bad health habits & willingness to learn about failing on tests. In both cases, optimists were more in tune with hearing the truth than pessimists. In addition, optimists:

- Remember bad news longer than pessimists – better to apply "lessons learned"
- Are more realistic, willing to give up sooner when faced with unsolvable problems
- Want to know bad news about themselves because they'll try to improve – & believe they can improve – whereas pessimists are apt to feel they can't do anything about it