

INFO OVERLOAD BEING DOCUMENTED TO MAKE DATA ACCESSIBLE

In a report "How Much Information?", 2 profs at UC-Berkeley are quantifying content from all gov't documents, business meetings, Internet sites, newspaper stories, telescope data, cable tv programming, ad inf. To put that visually, it amounts to **2 million miles of floppy disks** piled on top of each other. "It's going to change all of our institutions, some very soon & some later on, but all very, very dramatically," feels Peter Lyman of UC-Berkeley's School of Information Management & Systems.

- **Researchers are working on methods to make this info useable & useful.** Refined search engines, improved techniques for filtering out junk e-mail & pornography are examples of progress
- Since '96, Brewster Kahle has been taking "snapshots" of web pages. Each "snapshot" contains a billion pages. These are kept in 120 computers in a 30-foot-long row. Kahle donates results to an Internet archive that is being built for scholars, historians & researchers (www.archive.org)
- Kahle's company, Alexa (named after the library at Alexandria which housed the last known effort to collect all info), is building a massive digital library. It's available to anyone at www.alexa.com

DOES INFORMATION AVAILABILITY BRING BENEFITS OR ... ?

For public relations, it increases the challenge of being understood ... and of listening. Helping employees, communities, (wherever your orgn's

vital relationships are) to manage & make sense of info is pr's value added.

- Kahle & others in info technology believe people will create more & more variations on their professions & hobbies as they become increasingly better able to tap raw research, rather than waiting for it to be vetted & published or spoon-fed to them in some prescribed manner
- Rather than a homogenized global village, people are able to be individuals because of the vast wealth of info. This trend will continue as long as there's new info & it becomes accessible
- The democratization of information – its availability to anyone who wants it – will have the farthest-reaching effect, believe most specialists. They think that what many feel is overwhelming now, eventually won't be. People will adjust, as we have to the speed of cars & planes

NOBEL WINNER ON DECISIONMAKING GIVES PERSPECTIVE ON INFO'S ROLE

Herbert Simon built the first artificial intelligence program – a computer that could think. Simon, who died Feb. 9th, studied

how people think & make decisions. His theory of 'bounded rationality' subverted the classical view that org'ns always make decisions that maximize profits &, more broadly, individuals always pick the best choice among alternatives. Instead, he observed, they're saddled with too much info & not enough brain power. As a result, whether setting prices or playing chess, they settle for the first choice that's 'good enough.' "In Darwinian terms, it's survival of the fitter," explains a '94 interview with Simon.

- **Simon's advice: "Wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention."**

NEW VOICES ARE EMERGING FROM A "CULTURAL BLINDSPOT"; CAN HELP TARGET AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC NOW BEING MISSED

In "American Pie," Don McLean laments the 60s counter-culture as "a generation lost in space." The song is about the loss of innocence incurred by kids who came of age during a time when the president was murdered, a seemingly pointless war claimed thousands of lives & another president lost his legacy to scandal.

But author Jonathan Pontell argues the truly lost generation, demographically speaking, is the one that immediately followed – what he calls "Generation Jones," the group that trails the Boomers & precedes Generation X.

- **As children, those now in their mid-30s to mid-40s** could in no way relate to their flag-burning siblings. While Baby Boomers were talking flower power, donning peace signs, mixing bowls of hummus & marching on campus admin buildings, these kids were playing Twister at slumber parties, watching the Brady Bunch & gulping down Twinkies

Has this group – born between '54 & '65 – been thoughtlessly tossed into a category in which they don't belong? More importantly, has mislabeling been detrimental to the collective understanding of our cultural evolution – &, for practitioners, how to reach & motivate this important segment?

Pontell, a Joneser, notes that he & his ilk were savvy at an early age. Unlike the preceding generation, whose ideals were shattered by jarring events like JFK's assassination, Joneser's never "lost their innocence" because they'd seen it all. They grew up with pragmatic expectations, not only as a result of Watergate but because they saw the Boomers not walk the talk. After rallying for social change, they joined the establishment in the end.

NO LATE BOOMERS ARE THEY Pontell's 3 reasons Jonesers are not Boomers (or Xers):

1. **Shared formative experiences, not head counts,** form generational personalities. The first Boomers were born several years before birth rates happened to increase in '46. *Time*, chose its '66 "Man of the Year" as "The Generation under 25". Many of the most famous Boomers (Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Abby Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, etc.) were born well before '46
2. **Too long a span.** 19 years is too many in which to capture the collective habits & characteristic of a generation, says Pontell
3. **"Boomer" label makes no intuitive sense.** How can a 34 yr. old raised during Watergate, now entering the work force after just finishing her doctorate, be in the same cultural generation as her 53 yr. old dad who was raised during the Howdy Doody 50s and is now a member of AARP considering retirement? Is that 34 yr. old of the same generation as her 20 yr. old multiply-pierced, tattooed student whose childhood was shaped by the Reagan Years?

JONES – THE MISSING LINK

One reason it's important to differentiate Jones is because in many ways, this generation provides the missing pieces to the pop culture pie. "The predictable cycle of one generation's fringe style becoming the mainstream style of the next generation is visual illustration of the existence of Generation Jones."

■ **Consider fashion: mainstream Boomers dressed in a traditional style.** The tie-dyed, bell-bottomed, longhaired look was part of a counterculture, tho small & very visible. But this hippie style became the mainstream look of the Jonesers, who had 2 sub cultures: punk & rap. "The main common denominator of punk & rap was a sense of pastiche – the mixing together of seemingly disparate styles. This became the dominant fashion ethos of Xers. Not just the ascendance of body piercing, tattoos, etc., but an overall sense of sartorial anarchy, the 'anything goes' pastiche in contrast to the mainstream look of Jonesers"

■ **Life goals.** The segue can be seen in other areas. UCLA's annual poll of 350,000 college freshmen provides an example of how values transition. Students are asked to rank different goals in life. In the chart below, years are the median for frosch Boomers, Jonesers and Xers:

| GOAL | 1966 | 1977 | 1990 |
|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Developing a meaningful philosophy of life | 85% | 61% | 42% |
| Being very well off financially | 44% | 60% | 76% |

WHY "JONES"?

Because they're like the neighbors next door who are finally speaking up to be noticed. And, "Jonesin'" is hip, passionate slang that means a craving for something or someone.

Pontell takes exception to a caption reading "children of Watergate" below a '74 photo of Bill & Hillary Clinton. "That seems like an odd way to describe a 28 yr. old lawyer running for Congress & a 26 yr. old attorney working on the Nixon impeachment.... The real children of Watergate think differently; our concerns are more about practicality & results. The political landscape would look different if our collective voice was factored in." A lot of Jones-age celebs are taking up the cause, e.g. Rosie O'Donnell, Vanessa Williams, Patrick Swayze. "At long last, our silent generation seems to be clearing its throat. Soon, perhaps, *Newsweek* and others will know who the children of Watergate are."

ANTI JONES

American Demographics at first criticized Pontell's view, now gives it consideration. "What does deserve some attention is the idea of how we choose to define the term 'generation' today," says AD. "It's a debate worth engaging in, especially as marketers seek deeper answers into what drives consumer behavior." AD says definitions are comprised of 2 parts: a) numbers of people in a given age group & what that means for tomorrow's markets, and b) the issue of shared attitudes, common history & formative events. "Both are relevant.... His argument is well worth listening to on matters of generational attitude & personality."

■ All Jonesers (& others interested) are invited to attend an Internet symposium planned for May 20th. (More from www.generationjones.com.)

E-WORLD BALANCE: WEB ALREADY SELF-CORRECTING, SAYS RESEARCHER – & ITS IMPORT FOR BIZ, IF NOT PR, REMAINS

Web may have reached its "high water mark" in developed nations – but 1/3 of the world's population has never heard of it. Usership stands at 350 million, not the 1 billion by 2005 predicted as part of the "insane hype" for it. But what does this mean for practitioners, whether in global corps, NGOs & gov'ts or local org'ns? Researcher Angus Reid told IABC's eCommunication Conference:

- "What we're witnessing is an equal but opposite reaction to all the insane hype we've heard for years about the Internet. Like other inventions & technologies, it has been oversold & overpromised in its early stages
- "Still, I would rank the emergence of the Internet on the same scale as the invention of electric power & the automobile"

It is important. Practitioners should use it where it fits. But it's another tool, not *the* tool. [His statement reminds us that that earlier revolution, electricity, now a problem in California, Illinois & elsewhere, is higher in the hierarchy of needs than the Net – because the Net runs on it]. Some guidelines for its application in pr:

1. **Youth are addicted to it, in developed nations.** When Reid tried to survey teens & young adults who haven't tried the Net, he couldn't find enough to report statistically relevant data. 90% have used e-mail [probably irrelevant to pr unless you're spamming]. But 70% participate in chat rooms regularly [Topics discussed were not revealed, so is it just chit-chat & gossip ... or subjects relevant to org'ns? Or could this mean many of those comments in yourorgnsucks.com are kids?]
2. **May influence future brand or topic attitudes,** since 90% of teenagers in US & Canada use the web to help with homework. This assumes awareness today carries forward [which it most likely does, at least for name or subject recognition]. Might it also be a way to reach adults thru their children [this strategy has been used successfully many times in recent years, but is not automatic]
3. **For some industries it is revolutionary.** Banking for one, also investing. Retail? 120 million have made purchases on the web, Reid finds – & many are impulse buys [where pr has a major role]. But the jury's still out on longterm impact, tho it looks positive despite dot.com failures
4. **Any application where "convenience & interactivity" are important.** For announcements, whether it's school cancellations or employee notices, experience shows the web is an excellent *additional* tool. As voice commands, telephone capability, teleconferencing & other advances become commonplace, workers, members & even communities will spend more time in front of their screens [tho whether these sessions are technically on the web or on intranets, LANs or WANs is unclear]

THE BIG QUESTION

Reid wonders whether the North American model of access from PCs will prevail. Or the Euro-Asian model of wireless access by cell phones & palm devices? [If the latter, Net's value to pr will predictably be lower – since it's mainly a messaging, alerting or quick facts capability – or is it? Future tech innovations will tell].