VIEWER TOLERANCE OF COMMERCIALS SHRINKING

In a related "bad news" advertising story, Morgan Guenther of TiVo, which powers digital video recorders & works with every tv system, confirmed cable-tv execs' worst fears: At least 50% of tv commercials are skipped over by TiVo's 200,000 users. They are mostly from higher income groups, which advertisers want to target. Guenther does not think this means the end of the 30-second tv commercial, but it does mean there is little tolerance for commercials that are poorly produced or irrelevant to the viewer. These are being turned off at greater rates than ever before.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **A Behavioral Change In Teen Sexuality** is evidenced by the diminished number of teen pregnancies. Who should get the credit? Abstinence advocates? Birth control proponents? A sunnier economy? U.S. gov't reports that teen pregnancy rate hit a record low in '97 (having fallen 44% since '96) – latest year for which records are available. The abortion rate has fallen a third since 1990, also a record low. Researchers don't know why. "It's almost wholly up to speculation," says David Landry of The Alan Guttmacher Institute, which focuses on reproductive health issues. Those who support a greater emphasis on abstinence – telling teens to "just say no" to sex – credit an increase in support for these programs, which were infused with gov't money beginning in 1997. Others credit the availability of better birth control – including introduction of Depo-Provera and Norplant. There is also speculation that a stronger economy offers teens more hope for the future. Federal surveys show that during the 1990s, teens were more likely to use birth control and less likely to have sex. In 1995, 51% of teen girls said they'd had sex, down from 55% in 1990; among boys, it dropped from 60% to 55% between 1988 and 1995.

¶ **Having A Mentor Is Crucial To Women's Success In Today's Workforce.** But only two women head Fortune 500 companies; less than 13% fill corporate officer ranks. So finding a mentor may be difficult. To solve this problem, Sheila Wellington, pres. of Catalyst, and her staff have written *Be Your Own Mentor* (published by Random House). Book outlines a step-by-step guide to advancement. Wellington discusses issues ranging from how to master the art of networking to negotiating a salary. She provides tips on developing a successful style, managing time, creating opportunities and generating visibility.

¶ **www.employeesurveys.com Relates Boss Stories, Both Good And Bad.** One story concerns a boss who relayed bad news about bonuses – after a lean year, top management decided there would be none. "This, despite our group putting in six months of 12-hour-plus days on a project of great urgency. Naturally, morale was rotten." The boss gathered his group of 14 together and explained that though management was tightening its belt, he was personally grateful. "He gave each of us a certificate for two to dine at the most expensive restaurant in town." Kudos also go to bosses who: a) make people feel important; b) express appreciation; c) act like part of a team; d) don't mind helping with mundane tasks if it means getting the job done; e) will listen to and consider the employee's side of the story when a customer or client complains. Unfortunately, bad stories far outnumber good as site visitors submit tales about bosses who: a) pit employees against one another over incentives; b) act happy one minute, miserable the next; c) smile while firing; d) demonstrate jealousy toward employees; e) lie; f) micromanage; g) scream at people over the boss's own arbitrary mistakes; h) communicate poorly; i) hate maternity leave; j) throw chairs. "It's like working for the devil!" says one writer.

pr reporter

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"IF ONLY SHE UNDERSTOOD WHAT IT TAKES...." WHAT PRACTITIONERS NEED TO TELL THEIR CLIENTS

It takes two to make a relationship work. That point is underscored in the 4th edition of the *PR Client Service Manual*, written by The Gable Group (San Diego) in cooperation with the Counselor's Academy. While the guide stresses ethics and relationship building as a means of establishing a trusting and effective partnership between practitioners and clients, it also highlights the clients' role and offers directives that firms can share with clients to help them uphold their end:

1. **Adjust expectations to reality.** Rely on the pr firm for reality checks as to where your organization is headed, vis-à-vis market and its competition.
2. **Partner with the pr firm** and work together for mutual success.
3. **Allow the pr firm** to make a profit on the business.
4. **Avoid seeking something for nothing.** Expect to pay for program development, creative thought.
5. **Set clear business objectives** upon which the pr firm can build its program on your organization's behalf. Don't expect the pr firm to write your marketing and business plan (unless hired for that reason).
6. **Be responsive** and available, both for approvals and for audience contact.
7. **Respect the professionalism** of pr staff and work with them as you would any other professional consultant.
8. Appreciate that the pr firm won't know as much about your business as you do, nor should it be expected to. **Benefit from its point of view** and ability to translate the essence of your business for multiple audiences.
9. **Pay bills promptly** and address concerns ASAP.
10. **Learn the basics** of the pr profession – be inquisitive.

"While this sharing won't necessarily be accomplished in a single document or afternoon, the points should be made that reflect the client's role in building strong unions."

AVOID PITFALLS

Manual also outlines pitfalls that can cloud the relationship from the outset. Be quick to clear up:

- A misunderstanding of what the program will achieve (e.g., expecting publicity alone to successfully launch a product).

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- Confusion between pr and advertising (clients often see ad placements & results and may see clips in the same light, not realizing other measurable results).

- The client's tendency to limit activities by restriction of a budget or lack of knowledge in such a way that the desired results cannot be achieved.

All of these "points of confusion" stem from or result in unrealistic expectations, which must be addressed if the relationship is to thrive.

(For more information, visit www.gablegroup.com or call Tom Gable at 310/260-1680)

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE MUST BE COMBINED WITH KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUSINESS, STUDY FINDS

"The level of competence in communication does not affect business success *unless those efforts are directed at the critical business function*," explains David Clutterbuck about the study's findings. He and Domna Lazidou were commissioned by IABC to research and produce this 2-year study, "Communication Competence and Business Success: A Comparative Review of Communication Programs." Notes Clutterbuck:

- "The implication is clear: Unless management hires competent practitioners and puts those practitioners to work on the problems of the business, the effort is probably doomed to failure, or at the least may waste time and dollars."

Qualitative study also explores why the communication function and communication professionals are a valuable resource for an organization. It reveals four communication-related factors present in various degrees on all successful organizations & initiatives:

1. clarity of purpose
2. effective interfaces
3. sharing of information
4. consistent leadership behavior

Study involved an in-depth exploration of 10 companies that believe communication consists of the following set of 4 competencies: 1) strategy, 2) planning, 3) management skills and 4) quality. Researchers also looked at how these competencies are applied in other successful and less successful companies.

"Linking communication competence to business success has been a topic of keen interest to communication professionals for many years. This study opens the door for further research," says John Gerstner, 2000-2001 IABC Research Foundation chair. (Study available next month. $150/members; $180/nonmembers; www.iabc.com.fdtnweb)

PR WALKS THE TALK; SURVEY SHOWS "SEVEN PRINCIPLES" ALIVE AND WELL IN THE PROFESSION

Remember Stephen Covey's bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*? A recent survey from The Bohle Company (LA) found most pr firms mirror those principles by encouraging employees to continue learning and to balance work and personal time.

Bohle surveyed 150 various sized firms and assessed policies concerning employee benefits. "The survey shows that pr firms don't just spout popular management jargon, but truly implement the fundamentals of building a strong staff," says president Sue Bohle. "If you take care of your staff, they take care of your clients."

WORK IN THE BALANCE 40% of the firms adjust work hours during the summer staying open longer Monday through Thursday so employees can take half-days or free days on Fridays. 47% offer December holiday hours. Last December, 20% shut down all operations for the week.

87% allow employees to take unpaid vacation days and 73% offer compensation days for weekend work. Half offer three weeks of vacation after five years of employment.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING PR firms encourage employees to stay ahead of the curve through training sessions and classes. 58% of the firms have formal programs; 40% hold at least one training session a month (one firm offered 10 a month!). Training focuses on: a) relationship building; b) account management; c) media relations; d) writing. Most (90%) pay for continuing ed and/or professional development. 37% offer full tuition reimbursement and 31% offer partial.

Concerning internships, 95% offer them; 90% pay interns. The most common internship runs for three months; some offer 6-month programs.

Covey's Habit No. 7, "Sharpen the Saw," addresses self-renewal and advocates equal levels of work and leisure activities to promote a productive business environment. He also encourages execs to seek new learning opportunities.

FORECAST OF ADVERTISING REVENUE LOWEST IN 10 YEARS

Forecast of American ad revenue growth is 2.5%, which is the lowest in 10 years or since the recession of 1991, reports Robert Coen, senior vp and director of forecasting at Universal McCann (Interpublic Group). This is a cut from earlier reports: 6.5% in June 2000 and 5.8% in December 2000. Ad spending this year is expected to be $249.8 billion, up 2.5% from $243.7 billion in 2000. Coen said the ad market is worse than he expected. "It's not dead, but there are signs it will be stagnant for a while." The new 2001 growth figures are:

- Worldwide ad revenue total for 2001 is now estimated at $481 billion, up 3.7% from $463.9 billion in 2000.

- Overseas ad spending will grow 5% to $231.2 billion from $220.2 billion in 2000. This is the first time since 1995 that ad spending percentage increase abroad was more than in the U.S.

- Nationally, the biggest increases in ad spending will be on the Internet (10%), national cable tv (8%) and local radio (5%).

- Other growth rates are small: local radio (5%), local tv (3%), national radio ad spending (2%), and national magazines and newspapers (1%).