

He believes practitioners are well located to take lead or serve as interpreter specialists. "PR people & the media are just about the only professional groups brought up on the words of Rudolph Flesch."

Plain Talk is drafting model law that would require gov't & business to use plain English. Law will be written to be understood -- "not an easy task." Lohmeyer expects City Council of District of Columbia to be first to pass it. Group also wants to stimulate research including longitudinal study on paperwork people from different socio-economic backgrounds encounter during lifetime -- from birth to death certificates.

So far, some big names are behind Plain Talk tho' none in pr. Among them: Rudolph Flesch, Robert Gunning (Fogg Index of Readability); Paul Sailor, attorney behind FTC's readability program & chmn of bd; Paul Stokes, ombudsman for Commission on Federal Paperwork.

Group hopes to become info clearinghouse. Already has library of documents "in plain English & gobbledygook," info on legislation & regulations, firms & contacts in field. Memberships are open to individuals (\$20), corporations (\$200) & non-profits. For further info contact Lohmeyer at 1333 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Wash., D.C. 20036, 202/452-1268.

JUSTICE'S ANTITRUST DIVISION
SEEKS DIVERSITY IN MASS MEDIA;
SUBURBAN WEEKLIES NOW A FACTOR

"The emergence of the one-newspaper town as a national norm and the assembling of such newspaper monopolies into increasingly large organizations must give pause to anyone concerned about the concentration of economic & political power," says John Shenefield, Antitrust Div.'s ass't attorney general. He voiced opinion in supporting legislation to restrict certain large conglomerate acquisitions.

Publishing groups controlling 2 or more papers in different cities now own 1,095 of 1,953 U.S. dailies. In '78 they purchased 47 of 53 dailies that changed hands. In evaluating extent of competition among newspapers, Antitrust gives heavy consideration to growth of suburban weeklies. Paid weeklies now have circ. of 38 million, dailies 62 million. Between '60 & '77 their avg. circ. almost doubled -- from 2,606 to 5,075.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. Labat R. Yancey joins The Credit Bureau (Atlanta) as dir, cons/legislative affrs...Mark D. Spenny becomes asst dpa, Unigard Insurance (Seattle)...Richard Hirsch named new sec'y for comms, U.S. Catholic Conf (D.C.)...Betty Cott appointed vp-pa, New York Univ (NYC)...Nat'l Assn of Realtors (Chi.) names Louis Dombrowski dpi...Frank G.M. Corbin becomes dpi, N.Y. Univ Med Ctr (NYC)...Thomas A. Hamill named vp-pa, Peavey Co (Mnpls)...Chase Manhattan (NYC) appoints Steven A. Rautenberg, vp-pr...Mechlin D. Moore is named pres, Insurance Information Institute (NYC).

Alexander Grant & Co (Chi.) appoints Norman J. Crampton, nat'l dir of comms, and Rosalie Ward Delaney, asst dir...G. David Satterfield promoted to vp-corp rels, A.E. Staley Mfg (Decatur, Ill)...Plessey Inc (NYC) appoints J. Edmund Colloton, dir-corp rels...Eltra Corp (Toledo) promotes Dennis J. Signorovitch to mpr...Rosalie Shonfeld joins Motorola (Schaumburg, Ill) as mgr, pub comms...Elden E. Rawlings joins Univ of Miami as prof and chmn of dep't of comms...Standex Int'l (Salem, N.H.) promotes Sol Sackel to sr vp-corp mktg & comms.

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CASE STUDY: HOW CHRYSLER LAUNCHED COUNTEROFFENSIVE
TO SAVE NEW PRODUCT; INSTANT RESPONSE,
PERSISTENCE ARE KEYS

There's one thing tougher than building acceptance for a new product -- defending it when it comes under attack of highly credible, consumer source. That's position Chrysler Corp. found itself in when news leaked Consumers Union would judge highly successful, 6 mo. old Dodge Omni/Plymouth Horizon line "unacceptable" in 24 hrs. PR dept's skillful handling provides case of old adage, "Best defense is strong offense."

BACKGROUND Chrysler was conducting "long-lead" preview of '79 models for monthly magazine editors at Chelsea, Mich. proving grounds. Annual event was launching biggest new product line in history, including sporty hatchback version of Omni/Horizon car. 54 media reps present, from Hot Rod to Vogue. Early afternoon Chrysler learned of CU situation when surprised pr exec was contacted for comment by reporter from major daily.

"We immediately tried to contact CU's pr person," Tom Houston, mpr svc & parts, told pr reporter. "He confirmed the dual press conferences scheduled in NYC and Washington, D.C. for the following day. But he wouldn't tell us whose car it was or admit anything."

Irony, Houston reflects, is "two pr people presumed to be professionals at loggerheads over information." CU publishes highly respected monthly, Consumer Reports. Readership is 1.8 million.

CHRYSLER TACKLES Co's pr dept swung in-
CU HEAD-ON to immediate action
based on few press

leads & educated guess. Strategy was to cast doubt on relationship of CU's test procedures to actual drive conditions. One test, for example, involves yanking wheel 90° to right & releasing -- at 50 mph.

Chrysler filmed reenactments "as best we understood the tests." Houston & safety rels mgr took copies to NYC for sidewalk briefing; second pr staffer & engr. exec covered D.C. site. At insistence of NY press, Chrysler's safety rels mgr actually made it to podium after CU finished its presentation.

CHRYSLER'S CAMPAIGN

1. Sidewalk briefings outside CU sites, by Chrysler safety & engineering execs & pr staff.
2. Press conference, test demonstrations, at Chelsea Proving Grounds for long lead & Detroit press.
3. Independent tests by Nat'l Highway Traffic Safety Administration & Transport Canada.
4. Regional press briefings in Chrysler-Plymouth's 22 zone offices.
5. Follow up with media not in attendance.
6. Test & press conferences tapes shown to employees, dealers.

Same day, dep't launched third counteroffensive at Chelsea Proving Grounds where mag writers were still present. Invitations went out to Detroit media, wires, "every-one we could lay our hands on." "We tried to demonstrate as best we could that there was nothing wrong with this car." Houston said.

AFTERWARDS Program was "very successful," he told prr. Omni/Horizon sales dipped briefly but came right back. In fact, Chrysler sold 188,000 first year, making car most successful company had ever introduced.

Houston attributes results to well-reasoned, swift counteroffensive. "We were able to get in our side virtually the first go-around. And we were pretty gutsy about it -- we had our experts there saying these tests didn't have anything to do with real situations."

Houston believes, "Too many times, pr arms of large organizations have to 'no comment' on the first go-around. Then you never really catch up ... the newspaper morgue always reads 'Consumers Union says no;' the following day, 'Chrysler says CU is full of baloney.'" His advice to fellow practitioners: "When you get a chance, charge."

PHILLIPS SEES EXTERNAL RELATIONS CRUCIAL TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS IN '80s AS MAJOR POLITICAL CHANGE NEARS

"External relations will be the be-all & end-all for organizations" in '80s, believes political analyst and columnist Kevin Phillips. One reason is his prediction a "major sociological dislocation" -- similar in scope to the Revolution of 1776 or Civil War of 1860 -- is possible, and about due as a historical cycle.

Disintegration of political parties and rise of participatory democracy mean "American political system will be very unpredictable, very hard to cope with." These events signal "the end of the empire" -- which historically leads to Balkanization. In turn, that brings on strong leader -- which Phillips predicts U.S. will get in '80 or '84. Along with it will come strong central government, especially to regulate allocation of resources. Asked if this leader might be Ted Kennedy, he answered yes.

Move to participatory government is seen in fact that five of 10 largest states now have some form of initiative & referendum (Mass., Fla., Mich., Ohio, Calif.). Four or five others are moving in that direction. Illinois has its Lincoln Amendment, Republicans are pushing the issue in N.Y. and N.J., and Texas gov. Clements has called a special session on the subject. Only Pa. has little activity as yet.

Present political parties consist of coalitions rooted in agrarian vs. industry issues of 19th century. Since these are no longer relevant, parties fall apart. Replacing them are New Elite -- liberal, non-entrepreneurial, employed in knowledge industry rather than manufacturing or marketing; and Populist Conservatives -- which include farmers, industrial workers, ethnics.

Phillips told 20th PRSA Institute at Northern Illinois Univ. political change will arise not from "land-owning aristocracy of Oxfordshire" but from "Levittown gone mad."

MUSEUMS' ASSN FORMS PUBLIC RELATIONS GROUP

Another field has given formal recognition to importance of public relations. Amer. Assn. of Museums voted standing committee status to public relations and communications management professionals. Objectives are 1) develop professional standards, 2) "maximize public awareness of museum resources & activities."

PRSA has discussed establishing arts & museums section. New Orleans conference in November included breakout session for practitioners serving this field. 100 members are required to start section -- just the number AAM reports on its new committee.

MARKETING DEFINITION (WRITTEN FOR HOSPITALS) FITS ALL FIELDS, PR IN GENERAL

"Hospital marketing is far more than preparing news releases or distributing newsletters to a community. It runs deeper than advertising and promotional activities. It is based on user need rather than institutional need. It is built on the concept that the institution exists for the convenience of its constituents and not vice versa.

"Hospitals could learn a good deal from colleges and universities. Thirty years ago if a subject wasn't in a college catalog, it wasn't taught, and then many full time courses were only taught from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The only time students met the college president was when they walked across the stage on graduation day. That approach has changed drastically with directed study programs, weekend college for full-time undergraduates, and increased visibility of university leaders in all phases of campus life."

-- Richard Barry, pres.,
Public Communications, Inc. (Chi.) to
Amer. Protestant Hosp. Assn.

LANGUAGE SIMPLIFICATION ENTERS PUBLIC POLICY ARENA; OPENS NEW JOBS, RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRACTITIONERS IN '80s

Push for language simplification is accelerating on several fronts. Burson-Marsteller, for example, recently created language group & added

couple of specialists. Latest arrival is Plain Talk, Inc. -- pressure group headquartered in D.C., "symbolic home of paperwork problems," says exec dir. Rick Lohmeyer.

Plain Talk "isn't an 'English is going to hell' group, tho' it has its contingent," Lohmeyer says. It's a non-profit, educational 501(c)(3), oriented toward consumer & citizen concerns. Goals are to educate:

¶General public that it has right to understand what it signs.

¶Writers to learn & apply readability tools.

¶Teachers to return to writing instruction, not just literature. "We're turning out a bunch of functional illiterates."

¶Companies to adopt plain English as good business practice.

"Business is ready, gov't is ready," he told pr reporter. "A lot of them are already working on language simplification tho' they're not doing as much as they could. Until now, we had a movement -- without a mailing address, a forum." Issue opens new jobs & responsibilities for practitioners in '80s.

Lohmeyer predicts simplification will be an uphill battle. "There's a long history of bad writing," he says. Furthest behind: real estate, medicine, engineering & academia. Banking & insurance "have seen the handwriting on the walls, so has manufacturing" (see prr 9/5/77, 10/2/78).