

7. Consider short term sacrifice vs. lingering defense. A product recall may be costly now, but loss of

credibility is worse in the long run.

8. Prepare for a crisis and maybe you can avert it.

UNION STRATEGIES NOW ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Polls show public is favorable to the union concept but turned off by perceived union performance: 3 presidents in jail, too self-seeking, out-of-date and boss-run, says Murray Seeger, info dir, AFL-CIO.

Community Visibility In reporting union issues, media tend to be ignorant & biased, says Seeger. [At least unions & big business have one perception in common.] To get union message across, Seeger says AFL-CIO is giving priority to five projects:

1. Taking top union officials on regional road shows to improve both union morale & attract local media attention to union's agenda.

2. Pay attention to semantics in defining issues. In arguing for job protection, AFL-CIO pres Lane Kirkland pushes "fair trade" alternative to "free trade."

3. In-house professional training to develop local union spokespersons -- not necessarily branch presidents. Seeger says AFL-CIO needs to reverse tradition of media suspicion & union secrecy.

4. Encourage members to participate in community activities & identify themselves as trade-unionists.

5. Use electronic media. Arouse awareness of unions thru distribution of radio tapes, participation on local radio talk shows & paid tv adv'g. Seeger notes law allows use of union dues for generic ads highlighting union concerns, e.g. unemployment, provided spot does not advocate specific legislative solution -- that would require use of PAC funding.

First Amendment Concern Guaranteed right of association & assembly is crucial to unions, notes Seeger. "Everyday unions have to fight for the right to exist."

AFL-CIO's PR Concerns a) Use of professional public relations in building union success. Seeger believes only 20 unions have the resources for sophisticated management of public relationships. [Can any org'n afford not to have a professional, proactive public relations strategy?]

b) Need for union strategies to be perceived as persuasive -- not coercive.

c) Outreach on issues that concern all Americans -- not just union members -- e.g., lie detectors for employment screening, electronic surveillance of worker productivity.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. Public Relations Society of America's 1987 nat'l officers: pres, Jack Felton (vp, corp comms, McCormick & Co, Hunt Valley, Md.); pres-elect, Dwayne Summar (sr counselor, Robinson & Weskel Communications, Miami); sec'y, Dolores Swift (Dolores M. Swift Public Relations, Chi); treas, John Paluszek (pres, Ketchum Public Affairs, NYC).

Newly elected dirs-at-large, Michael Canning (Michael F. Canning & Assocs, Annapolis), Ruby Miller (mgr, socio-economic prgms, Martin Marietta Energy Systems, Oak Ridge, Tenn), Peter Klute (Klute Communications, Scottsdale), Marcelle Farrington (dpr & comms, Sun Life Assurance Co of Canada, Wellesley Hills, Mass.).

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations, Public Affairs & Communication

603 / 778 - 0514

Vol.29 No.46 November 24, 1986

KEY TO SUCCESSFUL GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN IS "PROVING PEOPLE CARE"; FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING GETS 3RD PARTIES TO SWAY OFFICIALS

It's not enough to go out & measure public opinion on an issue. According to Jack Bonner of Bonner & Assocs (DC), you must a) get public to react and b) bring reaction to the official body you're trying to convince. Adds Anne Wexler of Wexler, Reynolds, Harrison & Schule (DC): "Start action & planning on an issue when policy is being thought about. Don't wait for the issue to get on the legislative table."

CASE #1: Motion Picture Ass'n of America (Hollywood) vs. VCR manufacturers & retailers. Hollywood opposed consumers taping shows for later viewing, claiming copyright violation. They wanted law from Congress that would a) tax new VCRs & blank videotapes and b) allow Hollywood a percentage of all sales.

Action: Instead of stopping with letters to VCR merchants, Bonner used face-to-face communication. This 2-way communication allowed him to 1) overcome any objections in person, 2) establish personal relationships with merchants, 3) discover any special merchant/legislative relationships, 4) localize issues to emphasize the effect on the video store, 5) run local issue ads instructing people to call their senators.

Target: "We targeted the majority leader of the US Senate," explains Bonner. "We sent him a list of people who were opposed to increasing the price of VCR tapes. He picked 3 names at random to check on their validity...see if they remembered the issue & felt strongly about it." When all 3 said yes, legislature began to listen.

Result: Hollywood's law was defeated.

Two Important Factors: 1) Senators were hearing from voices they hadn't heard from before -- and new voices equal new votes. 2) Also, people care more about what ultimately affects them -- a price increase -- than they do about a violation of the copyright law.

12 MOST PERSUASIVE WORDS TODAY

"A recent Yale University study says these are the most easily understood words today. Obviously we ought to be using them whenever we want to sell an idea or help someone understand what we are trying to communicate," PRSA pres Jack Felton told conf attendees. They are:

- Discovery New
Ease Proven
Guarantee Results
Health Safety
Love Save
Money You



CASE #2: Morgan Stanley (NY) vs. Conrail's decision to sell to Norfolk Southern Railroad System. Morgan Stanley, an investment bank, recommended Conrail sell to the public to avoid a monopoly by NSRS. When Sec'y of Transportation Elizabeth Dole ruled in favor of a purchase by NSRS, Morgan Stanley began to fight.

Action: Identification of every public which would be affected by a railroad monopoly -- public officials, governors, mayors, shippers, other railroads, business organizations who want to keep their freight rates down. Over 350 constituents were identified & contacted. Mail protesting the decision, phone calls & visits to Capitol Hill followed.

3rd Party Endorsement: Over 100 editorials favoring Morgan Stanley (a 10-1 ratio).

Target: Sec'y of Transportation Elizabeth Dole and the House of Representatives. Because the Senate Majority Leader is the husband of Sec'y of Transportation Dole, goal was to persuade enough of the Senate so vote would be moved to the House, where heavy pressure was applied.

Result: Railroad sold to public.

Two Important Factors: 1) Appoint a field marshal. Someone must be in charge of organizing & monitoring tasks & strategies, which change along the way. For example: when there was no response to computer letters signed by constituents, Wexler sent blank sheets of paper & asked the public to write their own letters -- which was much more effective. 2) Target constituents & decisionmakers. Explain bottom-line impact to constituents to get full support. Hit decisionmakers with same message from as many different groups as possible.

HOW-TO ADVICE FROM A LAWYER ON NOT GETTING PUSHED ASIDE BY THEM

In situations like a liability crisis, practitioners must understand the roles of public relations & law, says Sara Schotland, partner, Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton (DC). Because cooperation is needed for the good of the organization.

She feels lawyers need public relations practitioners to: 1) help interface with journalists and avoid one-sided stories; 2) communicate technical concepts and set problems in context; 3) interface with agency officials & legislators; 4) discourage litigation by accurately explaining a problem to workers, consumers or community residents and telling what the organization is planning to do about it.

Public relations practitioners need lawyers, she says, to review copy, avoiding statements which may be taken out of context, invite litigation or constitute admission of wrongdoing.

What to do when the lawyer tries to muzzle the communications effort? 1) Develop a standing relationship with legal counsel. 2) Get involved early, establish a com-

Some practical steps to minimize liability:  
1. Imagine a plaintiff's lawyer will be reading your copy.  
2. Do your homework -- know thy subject.  
3. Avoid overstatement. Avoid broad statements.  
4. Document, footnote & date.

mon goal. 3) Understand the lawyer's role and the limitations on deference owed to "legal advice." 4) Ask the lawyer to articulate concerns, i.e., can copy be re-phrased to avoid the perceived legal risk?

CRISES CAN OCCUR AT ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, TO ANY ORGANIZATION Those who have been through one or more give candid (and similar) advice:

Two types of crises and ways to deal with them, according to Ltc. Ernest Miller, dir, nat'l afrs ofc, Salvation Army (DC):

1. Crisis of misdeeds...when somebody does something wrong. a) Get it out, get it all out...fast. b) Deal with, and be seen dealing with, the problems inside the organization. c) Always tell the truth; never lie.

2. Crisis of misunderstanding...people don't understand what you are trying to do. a) Bring in the media. Build interest. The public may not want to look, so you may have to invent ways to get them interested. b) Spread the ownership. Have more people take part in planning as well as doing.

Cookie-Tampering Crisis Generates Guidelines Rhoda Pauley, dir coms, Girl Scouts of America (NYC), offers these based on her experience during the cookie tampering crisis (see prr 8/5/85):

1. Confine story to locale where incident has occurred.  
2. Put situation in perspective, i.e., "for more than 50 years we've been selling quality, safe cookies."

3. Give consistent messages using limited number of spokespersons. Messages coming from one credible spokesperson is better than various voices.

4. Avoid comparisons. Don't give people the opportunity to link your incident with a worse one.

5. Limit statements to facts. Don't speculate. Don't guess.

6. Limit exposure. Answer all questions, but try not to do it piece by piece.

7. Hold the line. Institute levels of defense. Have a spokesperson (not the CEO, if possible) who can quote management and truthfully say, "I don't know -- I'll get back to you." If crisis escalates, then you'll have a "higher" & more credible source ready to come forward.

Crisis Means Loss Of Control Whether a crisis involves a product, service, procedure, corporate or employee issue, it creates a sense of loss of control. Leonard Biegel, vp, Burson-Marsteller (DC), recommends:

1. Have worst-case plan in place.  
2. Offer honest emotion & concern.  
3. Tell what you do and don't know.  
4. Announce it yourself -- if you can -- to all involved.

5. Centralize the flow of information. Isolate spokesperson from all other work. He or she will need the time to concentrate.

6. Answer negative stories -- do your best to correct so misperceptions don't run wild.