

How to make it as a free-lancer is featured in latest issue of The Professional Communicator -- WICI's pub'n. 7 pros discuss how to start a free-lance biz, what makes a free-lancer worth hiring, how to see your story ideas in print, how to maintain professional relationships with clients, etc. (\$2.50 from WICI, P.O. Box 9561, Austin, Texas 78766; 512/346-9875)

WHEN YOU MUST DEAL WITH THREATENING TOPICS,
BIOTECH'S EXPERIENCE MAY BE USEFUL

Research shows most people -- including gov't officials -- a) know very little about biotechnology, b) form their opinions by "worst case" scenarios, c) have a gut reaction that more regulation is needed. "There is a latent concern that the full implications of biotechnology -- particularly for the human race -- have yet to be revealed. Negative attitudes about environmental & health issues can seriously undermine a company's right to operate," says John Hussey, vp-pa, Monsanto (St. Louis).

Company's program to defuse public fear in 2 test cities (see prr 4/7) built awareness & initiated political support. Less successful was its attempt to field test a genetically-engineered bacteria at its experimental farm in St. Charles, 15 miles from headquarters. Some "lasting lessons" learned from the experience:

1. A skeptical press can quickly generate unexpected public & political pressures.

2. Desire to do field testing had commercial factors that confused the communications. "We were simply extending a research project one more step in a process. As a result, there was an understandable internal reluctance to commit the researchers' time to get embroiled in a public relations program."

3. "You can never talk to enough people. We thought we had touched most of the power structure in St. Charles, but in hindsight we had not. We initially briefed the mayor and only later briefed the City Council. We shouldn't have waited. We checked all the necessary permits. But even a solid legal position on zoning can be challenged in the press."

"In a time of close media scrutiny, small mistakes can quickly elevate the nature of controversy. We are a young, growing & learning industry with a long way to go in educating public opinion, the news media and the general public."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

AWARD. Glen Broom (prof of journalism, San Diego State) receives Foundation for Public Relations Research & Educa-

tion's 1986 Pathfinder Award for the best scholarly public relations research.

"We have to keep reminding ourselves that effective public relations requires as much care as developing and marketing the product itself. The biotechnology industry can't expect someone else to do this communications job for us. It's time for the industry to get its program together and take its case to the people." Hussey recommends:

1. Aggressively take the initiative to communicate with all segments of the public.

2. Identify, train & reward articulate scientists. "They have the highest credibility ranking of any occupation group."

3. Target communications programs at specific audiences, but tailor messages to many different delivery systems.

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,
Public Affairs & Communication

603 / 778 - 0514

Vol.29 No.48
December 8, 1986

AS OVERCOMMUNICATION REDUCES EFFECT OF MASS MEDIA, U. OF IOWA FINDS
PERSONAL 1-ON-1 COMMUNICATION BECOMES EVEN MORE POWERFUL:
OFFERS CHANCE TO GO BEYOND INFO TRANSFER, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

As practitioners seek ways to personalize contact with customers, members, shareholders & other key publics, telephones become vital public relations machines. At U. of Iowa, "Calling Home" is a program that is "basically a service -- with tremendous public relations overtones," William Harper, office of pub info & univ rels, told prr.

Families of freshmen & undergrad transfer students receive calls from a battery of 10 students working the phones each evening for 4 weeks. They call everywhere in the country, record all responses.

Objectives 1. Strengthen parents' positive feelings.

2. Reinforce the university's "caring attitude toward students & their families" to parents with neutral or negative feelings.

3. Ascertain parents' perceptions of students' adjustment to the school.

4. Follow-up where problems are identified.

5. Cultivate confidence in the pr office as a friendly contact that can assist if problems or questions arise.

Low Cost \$5,000 + administrative efforts makes the project "about the least expensive way to obtain a response from so many people in so short a time," says Thomas Bauer, acting dir, pub info & univ rels. True, schools have benefit of "slave labor" (or at least cheap labor) -- but volunteers are increasingly being used, even in corporations.

Iowa's Findings A. Last year, 54% of parents contacted were enthusiastically positive about the experiences of their sons & daughters during the students' first weeks on campus.

B. 31% were supportive but mentioned no specific pluses or minuses. They are categorized as neutral -- a condition that often changes, however, because of the calling program.



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A PUBLICATION OF PR PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC. DUDLEY HOUSE, P.O. 600, EXETER, N.H. 03833-0600
FOUNDED 1958 • \$145 YEARLY • ISSN 0048-2609 • COPYRIGHT 1986 • ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Positive responses also receive attention. They are directed to dep'ts concerned to provide morale boost, give the pr office positive visibility within the organization. Harper reports an unanticipated result is the increased spirit of cooperation & awareness among offices concerning new students & their parents. Program is a vehicle for student svcs to relate to other dep'ts. Each is more aware of its role in relating to new students and helping to resolve problems than previously.

C. 15% expressed complaints or problems. These receive the greatest attention, are followed up immediately with a letter from the vp/student services. Efforts are made to resolve the problems identified.

Pointers For Developing A Calling Program

1. Make certain key offices are supportive, prepared to respond to complaints as well as kudos.

2. Select callers who make a good impression on the phone -- which may be different than making a good impression in person.

3. Develop easy-to-follow script for callers.

4. Program must be timely -- in this case within 4 to 6 weeks after school starts, so parents have an opportunity to receive feedback & identify questions, but haven't had time to develop a head of steam over some perceived problem.

5. Record comments & complaints.

6. Callers should not attempt to answer questions or resolve problems. They simply provide the channel for concerns to be directed to the appropriate office.

7. Be sure this is not a superficial activity but is intended to go beyond a single phone call. Follow up quickly. Expect to hear from publics with greater frequency once you've identified yourself as a friendly contact.

8. Circulate info on the program within the organization for internal visibility.

While it is only one of many means to keep parents in the communications loop, "it's one of our most effective outreach efforts." Tho not directed toward fund-raising, it "unquestionably contributes to long-term development of support." Program won CASE's highest award this year.

PRACTITIONERS HAD BEST MAKE FRIENDS WITH NEW TECH, MASTERING RATHER THAN BEING MASTERED BY IT, SAYS NEW BOOK FROM FOUNDATION FOR PR RESEARCH & EDUC

"New Technology And Public Relations" is written by "users" whose enthusiasm & readable style make it

a very helpful guide -- a necessity for practitioners who want to stay on top. 11 chapters provide an overview of new tech, 22 offer case studies illustrating how it is being applied.

The book illustrates many successful uses & users, they are primarily in aid of support services -- electronic mail, VNRs, data bases, desktop publishing, electronic clipping services, teleconferencing, et al. "As demonstrated by its virtual absence from this guide, public relations' use of technology to support strategic decisionmaking is rare," writes editor Merton Fiur (The Center for Public Communication). "And the few applications that are available -- such as for analyzing change in the business environment, tracking

The Fiur acknowledges technology's integration into many areas of public relations, he reprimands pr pros for being laggards. "Public relations is years behind other business functions in adapting information & communications technology to its needs. This gap has deprived public relations of significant operating benefits and, perhaps worse, has helped reinforce the too-common management opinion that our practitioners are outside the management mainstream."

issues, interpreting government activity -- have been created by independent service firms, rather than by professionals within public relations....

"Management needs strategic information from the public relations area that can only be extracted and delivered in a timely manner with the aid of new technology. History tells us that management ultimately will take the steps necessary to get what it needs. What is at issue is whether or not public relations professionals will take the initiative in providing the information to management. If not, it will mark one more missed opportunity for public relations to enter the mainstream and elevate the function to top management status," writes Fiur. (PRSA mbrs \$24.95, others \$29.95, from Foundation, 310 Madison Ave, Ste.1710, NYC 10017; 212/370-9353)

An appealing -- even enticing -- function computers offer is PRSIG, Public Relations Special Interest Group. Chapter by Ron Solberg (vp-corp afrs, Continental Bank, Chi) gives details. Anyone with a computer, modem & CompuServe mbrship (about \$20) can access PRSIG's 3 services: 1) Bulletin Board allows you to leave messages for specific individuals or the general SIG audience. Responses, if you're asking for them, usually come within hours. 2) Conferencing, similar to using a CB radio, allows users to be online simultaneously, typing messages to each other in "live time." 3) Section data bases -- case studies, speeches, news releases, articles, editorials, bibliographical materials, minutes of meetings -- are stored in 11 categories. Users may leave material there to share with colleagues. PRSIG's 1700 members "are as willing to share their knowledge as they are to accept assistance from others. It's a most remarkable 'brainstorming' medium."

USEFUL ITEMS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Opportunity for organizations to sponsor booklet, "Where To Turn for Help for Older Persons." Project of Health & Human Services' Administration on Aging, cover page has blank space for organization's logo. Page ii is available for a letter from the president or other organizational message. AoA's strategy is to put the booklet "into the hands of all who have responsibility for the care of an older person." A shrink-wrapped, camera-ready copy is available for org's to personalize & reprint for their publics. Content is deliberately generic so no matter where the reader lives, he or she can contact a State Agency on Aging and be directed to the services in the community. (For info on camera-ready copy, contact Irma Tetzloff, 202/245-2205. Preprinted copies from US Gov't Printing Office, Wash DC 20402; \$1.75 each, 25% discount on orders of 100 or more)

A RULE FOR SUCCESS

"I always tell everyone to be personally modest, but professionally be as immodest as good taste and pragmatism will allow."

-- Edward L. Bernays to 400 guests at his 95th birthday celebration

Attention-getting, 2-sentence letter, printed on 7 1/4 x 10 1/2" white paper, draws attention to an otherwise sedate organizational brochure. Letter reads: "Enclosed is a 2-minute review of our business. We hope you will read it and find just one additional way in which we may work together." Simplicity, matter-of-fact tone contrast effectively with releases that use over-statement & excess verbiage.