

tors' concern has not been whether we use them or not but whether they're properly labeled.

"I see about a dozen or more that come in on satellite each week. But I don't use many here, generally because they have no interest to our marketplace or I can get the source from somewhere else. Most of us, given the option, use our own video."

But video releases "can provide a valuable vehicle to get the word out. The Dalkon Shield statement that went out during the recall is one example. It got a company spokesperson into our newsroom by satellite and gave us some video tape that we couldn't produce ourselves. It was the only game in town."

"My advice is don't overuse the technology. It's not applicable for every story. Choose when it does make sense and don't abuse it. Build up a relationship with stations so when we do get a notice from you about your video we'll know it's legitimate and we at least ought to stop and look at it and make a decision."

A FEW PIECES OF MAIL COPY PROVE WORDS CAN STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

piles of written materials daily. Here are 2 that signaled our attention:

1. A collection letter that continues to build relationships. Have you looked at your organization's lately? Curt or demanding ones can offset relationship-build-ing efforts that preceded them. Here's an effective letter from Time-Life:

"I once read a book...that said...it's easy to read...a letter that's written... with space between thoughts...in a manner like this. Not only, it said...is it easy to read...but easy to understand, too. That's why I'm using...this style to remind you...about the unpaid amount...on your Time-Life order. It costs an arm and a leg...to send bills these days...and anything you do...to cut down the number... will really help...and be appreciated. So won't you send...your payment now? Many thanks in advance."

2. A thank-you letter that speaks personally, sincerely -- strengthening the bond between giver & receiver in an era of carbon-form thank-yous:

"It is indeed rewarding in this day and age to find that there are truly sincere and dedicated people in our society. The Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association is made up of fighters -- they committed themselves to fighting for this country while they were in the service and they have continued the same fight as the disabled veterans. They fight because they have personal vision. They know in their hearts and in their minds that being in a wheelchair need not interfere with leading normal, productive lives. They also have vision about this country; it comes with their love and their faith in its greatness and its potential to become even greater. And, they have not been let down yet. The battle of the disabled veteran is ongoing, and we sincerely need the help of kind people such as yourself. The Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association is honored to have you as a friend, and we thank you for your great generosity. Kindest regards."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELECTED. Robert Rezak (dir media rels, Pacific Bell) to chrm, San Francisco Public Relations Round Table.

PEOPLE. David Speer (pres, Padilla & Speer, Mpls) appointed to UFla's Public Relations Advisory Council for 3-yr term.

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WHAT TO DO WHEN CONSUMERS CALL MEDIA RATHER THAN YOU TO REPORT "TAMPERED" PRODUCTS GOVERNMENT TESTS SHOW ARE OKAY? GERBER BABY FOODS STRATEGIZES ITS WAY THRU THIS MINEFIELD

"From the beginning, our strategy has been 1) to deal only with facts, 2) to rely on the credibility of 3rd party people who don't have a vested interest in the future of our company, and 3) to present the facts in a way that minimizes consumer fears created by coverage of unconfirmed reports," Jim Lovejoy, dir corp comms at Gerber Products (Fremont, Mich), told prr. To overcome latest scare over glass in baby food, Gerber is relying primarily on statements from FDA & state health agencies. "Last year, FDA recalled over 900 food & cosmetic items. So they're not reluctant to indicate a recall when one is needed."

Problems The difficulty has been identifying the problem.

Studies by health dep'ts & Gerber revealed no glass problems in either the manufacturing or packaging. More than 75% of jars brought in by consumers had nothing in them but baby food. But the media attention created fear. To counteract those fears, Gerber checked out every complaint. So did the FDA. Jars with the same code as consumer's jar were pulled from factory shelves, x-rayed & mined (contents put thru a sieve). Out of 50,000 jars, only 5 or 6 contained glass the size of a grain of salt -- "gives you some idea how careful this analysis was. Nothing was found that represents a health hazard."

Again... Another problem for Media Overkill Gerber was that consumers contacted the

media with complaints first, rather than going to the company, store or health authorities. When media would then call for a response, none was available. "We'd get calls from the media in, say, Kansas City asking about a baby who was allegedly admitted

to the hospital bleeding. We had no information. The FDA had no information. The Kansas City health authorities had no information. So we'd have to say we don't know anything about it," with predictable results.

"Public relations is intended to disseminate facts so the public can make up its own mind. Now, too many people say public relations is a manipulative process that gets people to do what you want them to do regardless whether it has anything to do with facts or not.

"And everybody has this hangup on perception. If you & I look at a chair, I may say the chair is comfortable. You say it's uncomfortable. That's the perception -- the degree of comfort. The fact that it's a chair and not a table is not a perception. If you say that's a table, not a chair, you're wrong."

Lovejoy says perception can't change facts, only color people's reaction to them. And perceptions shouldn't be treated as facts because you then cheat the public. "The public is smarter than people give them credit. They can make good judgments on their own."



Environment Is A Factor Also making it tough for the company was media's constant comparison to the Tylenol crisis. "There's no similarity at all. With Tylenol, people died. There was tampering. It happened in specific locations and when media called, the company could talk about those situations. But we've had no indication of tampering in any of our claims. And no confirmed serious injury."

Recall Seen Counterproductive Company determined recalling the product was not a solution because nothing was wrong with the product. "Everybody seems to be a pr expert. They say whether there's anything wrong with it or not you should have a recall. We did that in 1984. Rather than stopping the problem, it continued. Then when we'd say there isn't a problem, the public would ask why we recalled in the first place. They wouldn't believe there wasn't anything to be concerned about." That actions speak louder than words has a downside, too.

Handling Media Gerber was invited to appear on Good Morning America with an FDA spokesperson. "We deferred saying we couldn't add anything to what the FDA says." Today Show also invited the company. Instead, Gerber gave all its data to the show's pediatrician along with FDA contacts and a specially prepared brochure the public could write for. "If we'd gone on either program, we couldn't have answered most of their questions. The FDA hadn't found anything. We couldn't go on and say there's no problem."

Company invited a NYTimes reporter out to tour the plant and interview employees. A couple of major stories resulted. Media coverage has improved from the initial coverage of individual complaints.

Mail-TV Combo Company mailed a letter from its pres to 2.6 million households with young parents. Included a postpaid return card which gets a personal letter from the pres responding to specific concerns.

To put a face to the letter, Gerber's crisis mgmt team decided to do a 30-second ad on all 3 networks for one week, with the pres voicing concern and emphasizing the company's "primary responsibility for 58 years -- the health of babies." No mention of glass was made. "There was a lot of concern that the ads would make people more aware," Lovejoy reflects, but there was a need to "minimize & mitigate parents' fear." Ad asked people to respond with their concerns. "We've received thousands. Many are positive, saying, 'Don't give up,' 'I trust you.'"

Additional tv spokespersons have been trained. Company is sending them out to appear on shows directed primarily to women. Purpose is to talk about Gerber's "history & quality, positive things" -- tho they'll be able to respond to tough questions, too.

THE ULTIMATE IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Best place to get your message out is where you've got a captive audience. So for years counselors have tried -- mostly in vain -- to get bulletins into employee restrooms...particularly on the inside of stall doors. Now, National Indoor Advertising has taken this idea and is turning a profit on it. So far, it has 3,000 ads placed in the restrooms of more than 100 downtown Denver office buildings.

"The average office worker goes to the restroom 3.5 times a day, for a total of 14-16 minutes," says John Stanley, firm's sec'y-treas. Ads are placed in office

buildings because employees treat their office "like their second home. There isn't much damage." But to insure their protection, ads are placed behind plexiglass to avoid graffiti artists.

Survey done by the firm shows ads aren't received as well by the over-50 age group. "The younger set thinks it's just fine." Firm has now expanded its operations to include airport restrooms. It's a simple, inexpensive idea that organizational communicators can borrow at will.

PACs "BUY" POLITICAL ACCESS, NOT VOTES, FINDS SURVEY BY THE CONFERENCE BOARD

"Research results indicate that PACs buy sympathy and interest in the general positions of business, but not votes. There is no evidence of a direct link between a corporation's pattern of giving and significant legislative influence on a particular issue," concludes Catherine Morrison, Board's dir of public policy studies.

Common Cause, other good gov't groups & several legislators see a relation between contributions & recipients' stands on issues. To find out, Morrison surveyed 200 major companies that operate political action committees & 118 companies that decided not to.

Despite a lack of clear political clout, PAC numbers are growing -- from 89 in 1974, to 1,700 today. Other findings:

¶2/3rds solicit all administrative & exec employees for contributions. Few ask lower-level employees as many belong to unions with their own PACs.

¶They're expensive to administer, costing 25%-50% of total funds solicited!

¶80% don't consider party affiliation a primary criterion in giving PAC money.

¶While 1/3 allow contributors to earmark funds for specific candidates or parties, only 10% encourage this practice.

¶PAC mgmt is rarely a full-time job; less than 5% have a staff member employed full time. Managers generally come from pub afrs or gov't rels.

OUR LAST WORD (FOR AWHILE) ON THE VIDEO NEWS RELEASE DEBATE

Some practitioners say video news releases are used (see last week's prr). Large station news directors say they're a waste of time (pr 3/10). If you're still sitting on the fence, wondering whether to invest in the technology or save your money, here's another opinion...from the current pres of Radio & TV News Directors Ass'n, John Spain (WBRZ, Baton Rouge):

"They are used. It depends on the nature of the subject and size of the station's marketplace. I suspect they're used more often in the smaller markets. News direc-

Contributions by PACs to individual candidates averaged \$500 for Congress and \$1,000 for Senate in 1983-84. Surveyed execs note that donations are diluted by the diverse & often conflicting political preferences of business. Donations go mainly to incumbents. They're split fairly evenly between the major political parties. In '84, business contributed \$23.6 million to Republicans, \$20.7 million to Democrats.