

PR Has Firm Footing in Video & Film Production, But Management & Sales Meetings Are Handled Mainly by Others

(62.1%) in their own departments. These media tools are seen as an integral part of the public relations function. The planning and handling of management & sales meetings is the only function for which a greater percentage of respondents refer to another department (49.6%) than their own (39.7%). As these meetings are seen as an essential tool of public relations programs, more respondents can be expected to incorporate them into their repertoire.

WHAT DOES THIS AUGUR FOR PRACTITIONERS? GRUNIG SUGGESTS ONLY A NEW ETHIC WILL WORK TO GAIN SEPARATE IDENTITY, ULTIMATE SURVIVAL

of pr. Ehling feels prevailing presuppositions a) render it less effective, b) reduce it to a technician, rather than management, role. Grunig adds that the question is not what it can do (activities) but ought to do (ethics).

Grunig's research finds 2 worrisome facts: 1) Power elites in organizations select the publics whose cooperation is sought & dictate the basic strategy; the pr chief is often not among this elite because his/her skills are technical, not strategic. 2) The dominant frameworks of pr are "asymmetrical" (see chart) which amount to "craft" or "journalistic" models -- again, not strategic but technician's work.

Grunig cites research to show that 2-way symmetrical practice is not only a moral & ethical approach -- but more effective. What keeps it from becoming dominant is the presuppositions of practitioners. He finds:

"The framework provided by the 2-way symmetrical presuppositions is producing an original theory of public relations. We are not borrowing persuasion theory or theories of organizational communication. Rather, we have built a theory of public relations both with concepts from other research traditions and with concepts that are original to the theory."

The asymmetrical worldview assumes publics will cooperate if they are "sold." But often they're asked to "buy" such items as pollution, toxic waste, dangerous products, discrimination, higher prices, job layoffs, political favoritism et al. This "we know best" attitude keeps the asymmetrical models from being "ethical & socially responsible approaches to public relations."

Over 2/5ths of respondents handle video production (63%) and film production

Against this backdrop of entrenchment in current techniques, some say the real opportunity for the field is to alter its conceptual framework

4 FRAMEWORKS OF PRACTICE

Press Agency = propagandistic, seeking media attention; a 1-way asymmetric model. Dominates current practice according to Grunig's research.

Public Information = disseminates accurate info but does not volunteer negative info or seek input; a 1-way asymmetric model. Most popular in gov't & scientific agencies.

2-Way Asymmetrical = identifies messages most likely to gain support of publics without having to change the behavior of the organization, thus manipulative. Change benefits the organization but not necessarily the publics. Organization knows best, needs no free marketplace of ideas. Most popular in corporations & advocacy groups.

2-Way Symmetrical = uses bargaining, negotiation, conflict resolution to effect change in the ideas, attitudes & behaviors of both organization & publics, for mutual benefit. Used at times by many organizations but seldom their dominant model.

# pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,  
Public Affairs & Communication

603 / 778 - 0514

Vol. 31 No. 2  
January 11, 1988

The State of Public Relations 1988: Part II  
IS PR DEFINED BY ACTIVITIES; BY A PHILOSOPHY; OR BY PRAGMATISM?  
PUSH FOR PROFESSIONALISM RAISES NEW DEBATE, 3 SCHOLARS WEIGH IN,  
AND SURVEY FINDS FIELD SOLIDLY ENTRENCHED IN AREAS IT NOW CLAIMS

What does differentiate public relations from marketing, advertising, sales, personnel, general management consulting & other disciplines which sometimes infringe?

Push by the public relations societies for professionalism, the licensing movement, & increasing demands for "value added" by employers & clients are stimulating attempts to more tightly define the practice. Three respected scholars of public relations -- Bill Ehling, Jim Grunig & Scott Cutlip -- worked on the topic last year. The views they & others are expressing show great divergence. But 3 categories emerge -- activities, pragmatism, philosophy:

¶Ehling, SyracuseU: "Adversarial environments" are what make "public relations communication distinct." Every pr public is at least a potential adversary. In marketing, by contrast, the publics are known to want what is offered. Because of the need for "cooperation, accord & consensus in social affairs," this approach gives pr a "socially vital & institutionally necessary" role, keeps it from becoming "an appendage attached to marketing management." PR avoids conflict & abets cooperation. Negotiation is a key skill, publicity less so. "Sociology is to public relations management what economics is to marketing management."

He's concerned about "bringing everything under public relations" because it dilutes understanding of the field by clients & practitioners -- which makes it hard to achieve professionalism. Marketing has done well because it has a very specific basis. PR requires "some intellectual & theoretical substance -- something more than conducting sales meetings, writing press releases for new products, placing institutional ads" -- i.e. it cannot be defined by mere activities.

Another spur to the debate is the brouhaha over which services can be counted in the sweepstakes to be "No. 1" in counseling firm billings. In our typical tho unfortunate way, we turn this into a sporting event -- as if bigger were better (an argument which the nature of the field defies). The idea is an insult to the vast majority of practitioners who do not work in the handful of large firms but in companies, hospitals, ass'ns, gov't agencies, schools & colleges, smaller firms, etc.

Their goal is being No. 1 with the publics they labor to build relationships with. One suspects folks in the big firms are tired of this foolishness, too. But it may be temporarily useful if it abets some decisions about what limits, if any, there are to "public relations."



¶Bob Dilenschneider, H&K CEO: "Public relations isn't making slides, it isn't writing press releases, it isn't even dealing with media. It's problem solving." The trend to project assignments is a "disservice to clients" because it is quick fix -- the antithesis of solving problems.

¶Grunig, UMaryland: "Research has not supported the assumption of most pr people that messages change attitudes & that attitude change leads to behavioral change." PR does not directly increase profits, gain community or gov't support (tho it may reduce opposition) or increase employee morale & productivity (tho it seems to help employees coordinate their work with other people in the organization). What public relations does do is help the organization attain autonomy.

"Research & practical experience suggest that organizations want autonomy from their environments. They do not want to be regulated by gov't or pressured by interest groups. Loss of autonomy costs money -- to comply with regulations or to make changes to accommodate pressure groups -- and means the organization cannot freely pursue the goals it has chosen. Having willing consumers & employees also increases an organization's autonomy, because fewer changes in behavior are necessary to sell

Conclusion: Little agreement but many new directions visualized -- at least when contrasted to traditional public relations. Now let's look at what's happening there.

(Copies of Ehling's, Grunig's & Cutlip's paper from prr.)

PUBLIC RELATIONS HAS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIVITIES ALSO CLAIMED BY OTHERS, STUDY SHOWS

like financial or employee communications & institutional or advocacy advertising, have long been disputed. Others, like arranging management & sales meetings, have been considered outside the sphere of public relations. prr's Annual Survey explored these contested areas by asking, "Who in your organization has primary responsibility for the following?" Our findings appear in the table on page 3.

a product or get employees to work more productively."

¶Joe Macrum, Tenneco: "The greatest payoff in pr is in having an effect on what has not yet occurred. In any year, between 30-50% of meaningful pr activity deals with the unexpected. What doesn't happen as the result of pr advice may be by far the most valuable service pr provides. No question -- the ultimate test of public relations is: can it change behavior?"

¶Cutlip: "The social justification for public relations is that every idea, every individual, every institution has the right to be heard in the public forum; and today only pr expertise can insure that right. In bringing all sides of a public issue to the forum, practitioners serve the self-balancing clash of ideas out of which public policy is made."

¶Larry Newman, Manning, Selvage & Lee: What clients want is results. They "couldn't care less what your tools are." Concentrating on process is "looking thru the wrong end of the telescope" because it's more comforting to us. We must do what's appropriate for the client rather than what's comfortable for us. "Your clients want you to make them rich & famous; use whatever will work."

Some functions performed by practitioners are also performed by other departments. Some,

Traditional Functions Claimed by PR Solidly Held Against Competing Dep'ts Employee communications (71.7%) and product publicity (71.5%) are claimed by 7 of 10 respondents. They aren't exclusive to pr -- never were -- but generally reside there. Financial communications is where the depletion has occurred -- tho when "my dep't" & "both" are combined, 63% of practitioners are active in this key task. Interestingly, among functions performed in "my dep't," advocacy advertising (74.4%) and institutional advertising (71.9%) lead the list for least competition. For years they were fought over.

<u>PRIMARY DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SELECTED FUNCTIONS</u>				
<u>Function</u>	<u>"My Dep't"</u>	<u>"Other Dep't"</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Names of Other Dep'ts (Top Ones Mentioned)</u>
Advocacy Advertising	74.4%	21.2%	4.3%	Advertising, Marketing, Corp. Office
Institutional Advertising	71.9	24.1	4.0	Advertising, Marketing, Executive Office
Employee Communications	71.7	21.9	6.4	Personnel, Human Resources, Administration
Product Publicity	71.5	22.4	6.1	Marketing, Advertising, Subsidiary or Divisional Level
Video Production	63.0	28.3	8.6	Creative or Graphic Arts Dep't, Marketing, Training
Film Production	62.1	31.0	6.9	Advertising, Marketing, Creative or Graphic Arts
Financial Communications	54.2	37.4	8.3	Finance, Executive Ofc., Accounting, Investor Relations
Management & Sales Meetings	39.7	49.6	10.7	Marketing, Sales, Executive Office, Advertising

NOTE: "My dep't" -- referred to as the public relations department in the text -- also includes these main designations: public affairs, communications, public information, external relations.