

nation. And it is a pr problem -- as a headline put it, "With good PR, can Quayle fly?" Some feel he's already the most maligned veep ever, including Spiro Agnew.

New Mail Technique Reproves Effort Needed To Break Thru The Clutter. It's a transparent envelope -- so recipient is reading the contents even while preparing to throw it away. Made of glassine, it has preprinted cancellation to avoid damage in postal machines.

Listening To Customer Gripes Pays Off because it fosters brand loyalty, says Fortune Magazine. British Airways, which refunds grounded, diverted passengers & sends apologies to dissatisfied ones, reaped one of the largest airline nets -- and 6 years ago it was a big money loser! BA also puts video complaint booths in airports. Keeping the customer satisfied appears to be the trend in other industries, where toll-free 800 numbers abound. Customer Service Centers are gaining in importance. They're better staffed, the training more involved. Some major chains, e.g. Nieman Marcus & Hechingers, give refunds even if products were obviously abused or from a different store. GE mgr Powell Taylor says "Most businesses don't understand that customer service is really selling."

Journalists List PR Peeves -- One More Time. "They admit they 'need' pr, but chide them for often being inept," says Mgmt Review, which defines pr people as "flacks." PR activities are described in promotional terms -- press releases, telephone pitches, bagpipe players entering an office with a tray of shortbread cookies. Eds of leading publications list rules for pr people to fail by: blind pitching of stories without knowledge of the publications; stuttering during phone pitches; sending press releases with ribbon-cutting, ground-breaking photos in expensive-looking folders; calling the writer of a story that's about to break & asking him if the rumors are true. "The joke is the pr dep't is often the last to find out the news."

PR Firm Charged With Not Disguising Itself. In an open letter to the audit commission of Nestle's Infant Formula, Action for Corporate Accountability (Minneapolis) admonishes the Swiss company for holding a press conference that served no other purpose than to "provide Nestle with a pr opportunity." Also, "Nestle's public relations firm did not even try to disguise the fact that it had organized your press conference." If activist groups want to be effective, they're well advised to learn how the court of public opinion works.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Ron David (dir of civic afrs, comty svcs, Atlanta Gas Light Co.)

elected to Public Relations Hall of Fame by Georgia Chapter PRSA.

Following our custom, pr reporter will not be published next week. This is the last issue in 1988. Happy Holidays!

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,
Public Affairs & Communication

Vol.31 No.50
December 19, 1988

603 / 778 - 0514

AS YEAR THAT SOLIDIFIED MAJOR CHANGES IN PR PRACTICE COMES TO AN END, WHAT TRENDS EMERGE THAT WILL AFFECT ALL INDUSTRIES & SECTORS? PERHAPS STATE OF CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY EXEMPLIFIES THEM

It's the largest industry in US. Economic linchpin as "employer of last resort" in hard times. Central to rising issue of our crumbling infrastructure of roads & bridges. Seen as inconveniencing everyone with new buildings or highway repairs. And not trusted -- felt to be corrupt, unconcerned with quality work. How many of its pr challenges -- recently listed by Hill & Knowlton's Bob Dilenschneider for the Construction Industry Presidents' Forum -- are also facing you? A checklist:

- Workforce Problems -- "What we're dealing with is an uneducated, slipping work force." Shortage of skilled labor is forcing architects to alter designs, sacrifice quality workmanship. (The Wall Street Journal says customers requesting brick exteriors are persuaded to switch to prefabricated concrete.) Industry Week found 71% of its readers feel employee loyalty is declining.
- Restructuring causes managerial failure. "Companies are doing a bad job of catching up with the reality of management in the 90s. Many pretend to be the old, dependable, faithful, lifetime employer. Then the company switches tunes by conducting periodic organizational bloodbaths to slash staff." Spans of control are extended so far communication falters -- & managers do not have necessary training in communications.
- Competition for public dollars will be intense. The competitors are better organized than in the past -- so success means strong persuasion on your position.
- Resurgence In Unions -- inevitable, despite Bush victory. "They're in hot pursuit of 'new collar' workers at places like Harvard & Columbia. They won't let go of industries they've already penetrated." Even unorganized

"Expect a national policy on foreign ownership of US assets. This assures a high level of merger & acquisition activity before the door is shut. Private companies who want to sell may never have a better time, public companies wanting to stay independent should dust off defensive strategies." And, this policy will move toward "some central (economic) planning body" -- a Cabinet secretary, national economic think tank or planning bureau.



sectors will find unrest plus skill shortage equals wage instability. And unions now understand uses of pr techniques, e.g. construction labor "whipped up a sophisticated mix of lobbying, lawsuits, coalition building & press events" to persuade Toyota to use union workers at its Kentucky plant, reports Business Month.

5. National Debt -- "The trade-rich Japanese can afford to spend on their infrastructure. The debt-soaked US will be persuaded it can wait. It's easy to defer the maintenance of thousands of miles of interstate, 30,000 creaky bridges & rotting manmade support to our national park system."
6. State-driven legislation -- implementation is up 4-fold from 10 years ago. Construction is likely to be severely impacted -- e.g. catastrophic health-care. "Is your industry staffed in the statehouses?"
7. Increase In Regulatory Oversight -- The climate will toughen. Tax policies may change. Unless the industry defends its position, it could suffer.
8. Litigiousness -- A breakthrough in tort resolution is coming. Any industry with vested interests better be there to influence its direction.

In the 80s alone, construction's image was devastated by the Hyatt disaster, Bridgeport building collapse, Ray Donovan trial, North Sea oil rig disaster, news of radon gas, the ongoing asbestos horror & widely publicized cost overruns on public projects. Dilenschneider points out that construction is often associated with drug dealing, violence &, since the '30s, organized crime. Sounds bad, but what sector today cannot tote up a similar list?
9. Environmental Enforcement -- toxic waste, SARA III, acid rain etc. will all continue to be issues and to present opportunities. Expect a bevy of lawsuits contesting safety of present hazardous waste storage facilities & growing waste mgmt opportunities abroad, especially in Asia.

How Deal With This Welter Of Subjects? Dilenschneider urges construction industry to adhere to the basics: a) define itself as an industrial sector with an identifiable profile; b) educate the public about the business, about its technical sophistication; c) communicate thru op-ed pieces, speeches, releases, lobbying; d) develop a communication program on foreign competition & open markets abroad; e) start a management communication training program; f) establish associations & professional societies -- "Find continuity from your roots in the professional guilds of medieval Europe"; g) take care of "weak sisters" before the US Attorney gets there.

h) Latch on to the "spirit of America." Carefully pick a single worthy cause. "Maybe it's the campaign against drugs, a critical quality-of-the-workforce issue. It should carry construction the way Ellis Island & the Statue of Liberty carried Lee Iacocca, or that McDonald's is identified with the Ronald McDonald home for gravely ill children."

ISSUE ANTICIPATION MADE SIMPLE:
ONE PRACTITIONER'S METHODOLOGY

Ran Coble is exec dir, North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research (Raleigh). His job is to know the issues present & future.

How he works, using 4 sources for anticipating issues:

1. Demographic data. Good because someone else is doing your research for you. Bad because someone else is picking the questions to be answered. Excellent for tracking quantifiable trends -- data that can't be gainsaid. Example: in his state 65+ age group is rising. Implication: healthcare & related issues will be center stage.
2. Secondary research. Polling data, citizen surveys, behavioral studies. There's a vast increase in local surveys by gov't, chambers of commerce, media, research firms -- so data is available that didn't used to be. Major purpose of much of it is to identify issues, get stance of publics, find source of problem, ask if willing to do something about it. Interest by media of all types -- mass & targeted -- in this data is great, so much is published. To save costs, much of this research surveys opinion leaders -- so it's more useful than a general poll (actionable public opinion vs. general public opinion). Again, someone else is choosing the questions. But often they'll add yours if you ask.
3. News content analysis. The old WWII enemy nations research, made famous by John Naisbitt. Theory: newspaper space is finite, a closed system, so trends crowd out other items -- thus identifying priorities. But topics must be tracked & recorded to provide valid data. Good method since trends rise from the bottom up (whereas fads are top down).

Coble divides issues into 3 categories, asks a driving question about each. 1) short term, such as a scandal = what's my 20-sec response for tv? 2) long term, such as water policy = where's the decision going to be made (local, state, federal, privately)? 3) Long-term emotional, such as toxic waste disposal = is the crux factual, emotional or both? For type 3, he finds the key is to add style to messages & appeals, e.g. symbols, themes. Sometimes "cool reason" is a viable stance, if you proclaim it as your guide.

By mixing data from all 3 methods, Coble is able to build a case that enables action plans to be made.

¶29 states now have public policy research centers -- a basic source of localized data. For a list with description of each, courtesy of Coble's "North Carolina Insight" magazine, write pr.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶VP-Elect Quayle's Situation Makes An Entertaining Subject For Training Sessions. Ask group to deal with this issue, from both strategic & tactical aspects: What program would you undertake to make Quayle vice presidential, or at least acceptable & not the butt of jokes? Participants are motivated, say those who've tried it, because it is an admitted problem with consequences for the