

Research Methods Used By PR Professionals To Support Planning & Evaluation

	<u>Frequently</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Never</u>
Literature searches & info retrieval	34%	47%	16%
Publicity tracking or media monitoring	30	51	16
Surveys by phone or mail with simple cross-tabbing of findings	27	51	18
Focus groups	20	53	24
PR or communication audits	16	59	20
Secondary analysis of existing data	16	42	37
Analyzing or tracking consumer inquiries, requests, complaints	15	46	35
Qualitative depth interviews with opinion leaders	14	43	39
Readership/readability studies	12	49	36
Pre- & post-tests	8	48	40
Sophisticated data collection & analysis techniques -- conjoint or factor analysis	7	29	59
Psychographic & demographic analysis	6	28	62
Mall intercept (shopping center studies)	6	28	64
Content analysis	5	51	39
Experimental designs comparing "test" groups to "control" groups	4	30	61
Unobtrusive methods such as observation, participation or role playing	2	22	70
Model building	2	17	77

("No Answers" are not shown)

-- Survey of 945 senior practitioners in major corp'ns, fin'l institutions, utilities, trade ass'ns, NPOs, pr firms & academic institutions. 253 responses.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HOSPITALIZED. Bob Berzok (IABC chrm '86-'87; dir corp comm, Union Carbide, Danbury, Ct) & his wife, Sharon (Star Communications, Stamford), were in a car accident June 10 while in California after IABC Conference. Sharon died. Bob is in a trauma unit with bruised

liver, lung damage, broken ribs. Because he's on a respirator, he can't talk but can write. Cards, letters can reach him at AMI Sierra Vista, Intensive Care Unit, 1010 Murray Ave, San Luis Obispo, Calif. 93406

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,
Public Affairs & Communication

603 / 778 - 0514

Vol.31 No.25
June 20, 1988

EVEN DURING GREAT INCONVENIENCE, LIKE HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION, PUBLIC RELATIONS CAN KEEP PEOPLE HAPPY BY DEMONSTRATING CONCERN, SHOWING WHAT THEY CAN DO TO AVOID PROBLEMS

Drivers, you won't believe this, but someone has done something about the horrors of road construction. "We made 120,000 daily users of Detroit's Lodge Freeway happy because of 'Lodge.ability'" -- a program that focused on service to drivers while the road was being rebuilt. "The project taught us a lesson about how highly the public values service," Jack Pyle, dir comms, Mich. Dep't of Transportation, told pr.

Internal Problem "We were fragmented in our approach. Design was done by one group of engineers, then traffic & safety engineers decided how to handle the traffic, and another group of engineers then supervised construction. Public relations might or might not be used...probably not. There was some, but not a great deal of thought for how construction projects affected the driving public."

External Problem Lodge Freeway project met stiff opposition. Detroit Central Biz Dist Ass'n and the City Council both feared loss of traffic to downtown. Businesses along the 9-mile freeway and news media joined the outcry.

Research -- phone survey of 800 Lodge users --- showed public wanted improvements but was apprehensive about how the work would affect them: a) 53% said the work was absolutely necessary; b) 50% didn't think the state could reduce inconveniences during construction.

Public Relations Program 1. Motorist Info Plan. 85 org'ns were invited to join a community task force to devise this plan. More than 50 participated.

2. Frequent traffic updates. Aggressive media program told status of work, best times to drive, alternate routes. Full-time media specialist was hired for this assignment.

3. Helicopter Traffic Reporters. This group was given special attention at a luncheon with the MDOT dir before the project & frequent reports about construction activities as they progressed.

4. Hotline. Provided taped messages giving motorist info. Often updated daily. Averaged 850-1,000 calls monthly during the 2 yrs of construction.



- 5. PSAs. 6 tv PSAs described construction, informed viewers of the hotline & alternate routes. One station used them frequently during prime time.
- 6. Alternate route brochures. 750,000 distributed by comty task force members & a radio station. 4 versions, targeted to specific sections of the city, showed how to get on alternate routes.
- 7. Speakers Bureau. Slide prgm presented to 600 people in 10 org'ns.
- 8. Training for those apt to be questioned. 550 public contact people -- telephone operators, waiters/waitresses, ticket sellers -- were trained in 18 briefings, enabling them to give info to motorists.
- 9. Newspaper ads were used twice -- beginning of construction & when one side of freeway was closed. Ran fewer than planned because of excellent ongoing coverage by news media.
- 10. Free Tow Truck Service. Traveled the Lodge & alternate freeways for 2 yrs providing gas, jump starts, or towing stranded vehicles to eliminate traffic tie ups. About 100 vehicles/week received the free service.

Results 2nd phone survey taken after 1st yr of construction showed positive attitudes: a) 88% felt construction caused little or no inconvenience; b) 58% rated MDOT's efforts to reduce inconvenience good or excellent; c) 61% said state did a good or excellent job of providing info. 42% recognized the "Lodge.ability" theme and could define it..."an enviable record for a new 'product.'"

More than 200 officials & engineers from 20 states visited Michigan to observe the project & learn about its results.

Human Impact Statement A new team approach to highway construction has been adopted. A design engineer & project construction engineer will be assigned. They will create a team of people from all the disciplines involved, including public relations. Projects will be considered in terms of a Human Impact Statement.

Team will develop 1) human impact checklist, determining exactly which businesses, groups of people, hospitals, schools, sports events, others will be affected & how; 2) action plan to reduce impact; 3) comms plan to inform public.

"We're using what we learned from 'Lodge.ability' in '88 highway construction. MOBILITY '88 is our commitment to quality service. It means doing construction at night. Keeping lanes open during peak traffic times. Communicating so people know what to expect. Working with business & civic leaders so we can respond better to community needs. It means special bonuses to contractors for completing crucial projects early."

Negative attitudes of biz & media turned around. Opponents became supporters as documented by letters, quotes, editorials, news, features & columns in print & radio/tv. Headline in Detroit Free Press on day after southbound Lodge closed read: "No Lodge? No Sweat!" Detroit News read: "Detroit gave a traffic jam, but nobody came." Research showed Lodge users learned about freeway repairs thru radio (70%), newspapers (71%), tv (80%).

PLEASE RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

...for prr's 24th Annual Survey of the Profession, which you received last week. We made it respondent friendly this year by stretching it to 4 pages. If you've misplaced yours, give us a call (603/778-0514). Thanks for responding!

STUDY SHOWS CURRENT PR RESEARCH "CASUAL & INFORMAL RATHER THAN SCIENTIFIC & PRECISE" However, 57% now feel it is possible to measure public relations effectiveness in precise terms. Other findings on extent of research use:

- ¶75% use it for planning or developing a new prgm, strategy or activity.
- ¶58% use it for monitoring activities so midcourse corrections can be made.
- ¶56% measure or evaluate outcomes, impact or effectiveness of programs.
- ¶41% conduct research for publicity & promotional purposes.

¶36% do research during a crisis to get a quick "reading" of public opinion. Of these, only 9% do this "very frequently"; 27% "occasionally;" 61% "rarely" or "never" conduct research under crisis conditions.

¶Trade ass'ns (64%) & large utilities (75%) are more apt to have funds built in to their pr budgets for research than are practitioners working for retailers (38%) or NPOs (36%). Many respondents complain that lack of money is the prime reason they are not doing as much research as they would like.

¶Of those who do allocate money for research, a) 23% set aside less than 1% of budget; b) 32% spend 1-3%; c) 21% say 4-6%; d) 12% say it represents 7% or more.

¶53% say volume of pr research projects has increased greatly -- by 10% or more -- since 1985. 24% say it has increased by 1-9%.

¶97% believe practitioners must become better educated in research techniques & applications. (More info from Ketchum PR, 1133 Ave of the Americas, NYC 10036; 212/536-8765)

"PR research has been in the Dark Ages," says Walt Lindenmann, vp/res dir, Ketchum Public Relations (NYC). He points to 2 factors that have slowed its growth: 1) lack of funds, 2) a feeling by some that what happens in public relations can never be precisely measured. "Now the magic word in pr is accountability, with management saying prove to us that your programs are really working."

Some Verbatims

¶"What's really needed is more understanding of how pr research can be used to educate & inform CEOs, CFOs & product managers. We in pr are often perceived as doing the same kinds of things that marketing & advertising specialists do. We need researchers to show us techniques that will help underline the differences & emphasize our contributions." -- Fortune 500 industrial company exec

¶"CEOs talk in numbers, facts & figures; so must pr practitioners if we are to be taken seriously by corporate leaders." -- Financial institution pr mgr