

TV'S POWER LIES IN LONGTERM VALUE REINFORCEMENT, GETTING UNINFORMED TO PROCESS INFO

"Television exercises its greatest power over those who do not hold strong opinions or who have no opinion or information about a particular topic or group of people.... In dealing with a variety of socially relevant topics such as racial & ethnic relations, tv not only entertains, it conveys values & messages that people may absorb unintentionally. This is particularly the case with young people," write Robert & Linda Lichter (co-dirs, Center for Media & Public Affairs, DC) in Media&Values.

To find out if young people see ethnic tv characters as either positive or negative role models, as real people or figments of fantasy, the Lichters surveyed 1,200 high school students in the Howard Beach area of Queens, NY. Some findings:

¶2 of 5 watch tv 4+ hrs/day; 1 in 6 watches at least 6 hrs daily.

¶40% say they learn a lot from tv.

¶25% say tv shows what life is really like.

¶24% say people on tv are like real life.

¶26% say tv influences their racial & ethnic attitudes.

¶Blacks, more than any other group, use tv to learn about life: a) 51% say they learn a lot from tv; b) 30% say the same things happen in tv & real life; c) 23% often identify with ethnic tv characters.

How ethnic groups, even professions, are portrayed on tv is a valid concern. While tv can't change beliefs, it can reinforce. Archie Bunker was meant to poke fun at intolerance. But prejudiced viewers saw him as an admirable character. He reinforced their beliefs. (More info from Media&Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, LA, Calif. 90034; 213/559-2944)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Honors. 1988 National award winners of Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS): Award of Attainment, Neil Oakley (chmn, Publicorp Comm's Inc, Montreal); Shield of Public Service, Jean Freeman (dir, internal comm's, SaskTel, Regina, Saskatchewan).

Elected. CPRS 1988-89 National Executive

Committee: pres T.A.G. Watson (dir corp comm's, Tricil, Mississauga, Ontario); pres-elect John Francis (chmn, Francis, Williams & Johnson, Calgary, Alberta); vp Elizabeth Hirst (vp, Le Cabinet de relations publiques National, Montreal); sec Barbara Sheffield (nat'l dir com's, Arthritis Society, Toronto).

pr reporter

The Weekly Newsletter of Public Relations,
Public Affairs & Communication

603 / 778 - 0514

Vol.31 No.26

June 27, 1988

NEW HARD-HEADED, SHOW ME, SCIENTIFIC PUBLIC RELATIONS IS HERE; WHAT IT MEANS FOR TODAY & TOMORROW COULD BE REVOLUTIONARY

Preparing for its 30th anniversary issue in September, your editors have been charting the major changes in practice over that time span. In addition, prr just finished reviewing a library of illustrative case studies -- both what worked & what did not. Together with what readers have been telling us, they iterate the following trends -- which are far more surgical than many seem to realize:

1. Behavior is the goal, not image or information transfer. Outcomes, not outputs.

¶Management asks: Unless key publics can be motivated to do something, or not do something, why should resources be invested in pr?

¶Old goals like communicating messages are only process -- half the job. The question is not whether publics receive the message but whether they act on it.

¶Response to a great media placement, a super event or similar is "So what? What is changed because of it?" PR is by nature a change agent. Its programs are expected to result in change (even tho that sometimes equates with holding position against an attack). Things should be different following effective pr activities.

Dayton Hudson's Thwarting of a Takeover Demonstrates the Case for Behavior

99.9% of org'ns, facing that threat, would've found people saying "What a shame" -- but not willing to stick their necks out to do anything! DHC's key publics leapt at the chance to lobby for changes in Minn's anti-takeover law -- enacted within 7 days at a special session because of their outcry. The company is the only one in memory to come out unscathed from raider-mania -- no greenmail, no downsizing. What good, what value added, what bottom-line would "good feelings" or "positive image" have been to DHC?? It needed instant behavior, not warm fuzzies. These are ultimate times, demanding ultimate value from pr activities.

"Image" has always bothered many practitioners, since it literally means an unreality -- not substance. New evidence indicates building image can be counterproductive. An "image" can exist only when publics have no direct experience of the product, organization, candidate etc. Once they have such experience, it wipes out the image. Henceforth the frame of reference is their experience, and both previous & future image-building are measured against it. Since the expectations created by much image-building are near-impossible, credibility is damaged. Instead of hyping image, therefore, why not work from the start to build actual experience? Or at least a reputation built on substantiated reality?



2. Supertargeting carries the technique forward in 2 areas.

¶First, publics are carefully prioritized both for their importance to the organization and for probability of acting on their feelings toward it.

¶Some publics, tho important, are down-ranked because they are unlikely to take action. The guideline is no longer "public opinion" but "action-able public opinion", i.e. who's likely to do something about their opinions?

¶Once priorities are decided, realistic application of available resources is made. As a result, lower rated groups may not receive attention -- because money, time & manpower won't stretch that far. No more trying to reach everybody -- in vain.

¶Second, within the priority publics efforts are further targeted toward opinion & power leaders, recognizing their role model status. Others do follow them.

3. Focused appeals solicit desired behaviors directly from the targets.

¶Scatter-shot communication gives way to rifle-shot relation-building.

¶Traditional long copy, which research shows to be increasingly unread & unheeded, is replaced by brief, pithy, focused materials.

¶Videos that require groups to gather & watch are questioned -- since so many never get played.

¶Newsletters become single-sheet 2-siders, in large type, with full heads & 1,2,3, A,B,C organization of info. Gone is the assumption people will read paragraphic matter and somehow distill the conclusions intended. Now the ideas to be imparted are laid out in indents, charts or other unmistakable form -- so the takeaway is uniform, not left to chance.

Doubters will find convincing evidence abounding. If USA Today & the 20-sec bite of tv news aren't enough, consider the Lawyer's Rule: never make more than 3 points to a jury. Or the Congressman's Guide: always vote no on anything that takes longer than 2 minutes to explain.

¶Strategy is what counts, not Shakespearean prose.

Implications A. Research is a basic skill for practitioners, both for planning & evaluating. This means including it in budgets!

B. Counseling ability is critical. Skeptical managerial colleagues need constant persuasion & guidance -- in the public relations arena they know so little about.

C. True editing capabilities are more important than writing skills (if they can be separated). Practitioners now must select which points are salient & memorable, then present only those -- or at least highlight them more than previously was necessary. No more throwing it all in & letting the reader struggle to get the meaning. Even hard core journalism recognizes this now. Reader, viewer, listener, attender friendly is what works.

REPLY REQUESTED

Reading this right? Please share contrary or supporting cases, evidence & opinions. The subject seems certain to remain the issue for the foreseeable future, as downsizings, reorganizations & other traumas indicate.

CONTRIBUTIONS SET RECORD DESPITE MARKET CRASH, TAX DEDUCTION CHANGE \$93.68 billion was donated to NPOs last year -- highest amount ever recorded. 6.45% over the \$88 billion in '86, reports Amer Ass'n of Fund-Raising Counsel. Individuals gave more than 4/5ths of the total -- \$76.82 billion. Estates contributed \$5.98 billion; foundations (excluding corporate fdns), \$6.38 billion. Business donated only \$4.50 billion, proving again that the idea Corporate America can pick up the slack is unrealistic.

Neither the stock market crash nor the loss of the charitable deduction for those who don't itemize on their income tax forms caused giving to suffer as predicted. "The message is clear: the philanthropic impulse in the US has never been stronger," says Maurice Gurin, chrm, AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy.

Who got the money: a) religion, \$43.61 billion; b) health/hospitals, \$13.65 billion; c) education, \$10.55 billion; d) human services, \$9.84 billion; e) arts, culture, humanities, \$6.41 billion; f) causes including environmental protection, public safety, urban & rural enhancement, human rights, \$2.44 billion; g) other groups, \$6.89 billion. Once again the conservative nature of philanthropy is clear. Only a small percentage goes to activist organizations.

EVEN MOST PRIVATE OF PRIVATE COMPANIES SHIFTS EMPHASIS TO EMPLOYEE PUBLIC Bechtel is a worldwide industrial engineering & construction firm so influential both George Schultz & Cap Weinberger worked there before joining the Reagan cabinet. It is privately held. But organization-wide emphasis on meeting employee needs is replacing last year's focus on staying financially healthy, reports Bechtel News. Commitment comes from chrm Steve Bechtel Jr. who spoke to standing-room-only crowd of employees at his annual Forum. It is people rather than projects that present the company's biggest challenge this year, he told them.

"To my mind, the most important issue now -- and the one on which we have the most work to do -- is taking more interest in our people, in their treatment & development, and in communications, both upward & downward."

Tangible indication of Bechtel's intentions was felt by San Francisco employees when he announced seating at headquarters cafeteria would be restored. It had been converted to a self-service, takeout operation in '84 as a cost-cutting measure. Training & development programs are also planned:

¶Start technical master's degree program at Stanford.

¶Increase number of training programs, especially those that emphasize skills needed in the company's new or expanding biz areas.

¶Create skills-resources system to help match individuals with available positions, new jobs, prospects.