

Poker-Page finds most organizations pass out the booklets -- but employees don't read them. "They should just be referral documents," she says. More effective to have pr involved with providing audio-visual shows, employee meetings, brochures that highlight the most important information & question/answer forums. "Organizations need to go beyond the written word."

Is it important to go the extra mile for employees? Tom Monaghan, whose success in creating Domino's Pizza has become legendary, recently told USA Today: "I disdain traditional business practices. Business is nothing but people. Most important are your customers and the job is to fulfill their needs & expectations. Next are your employees. The lower the level of employees, the more important because they are the ones who do the work. Most new ideas come from them."

NETWORK TV CHANGING TO ADAPT TO CABLE THREAT; WILL NETWORKS DISAPPEAR?

Will cable glut force networks to alter their format? Donn Selkowitz (Sigma Mktg Group) sees big changes ahead -- e.g. networks charging for programming. "The big three will have to find

other sources of income. They're supported by the advertisers, and the advertisers are looking elsewhere."

Already this seems evidenced by NBC's cable channel, "Consumer News & Business," on-line for '89. Dom Giofre of NBC told prr the venture signals adaptation rather than resistance to the cable challenge. "The competition from cable & VCRs is something that must be answered." NBC is already involved with cable programming and is eyeing international projects. "The position at NBC is, 'We should be part of this.'"

Giofre maintains the future looks good for the nets. "Cable penetration is 53% -- that means 47% of homes are unwired. Also -- networks are still providing better quality programs." But asked if networks will start charging for shows, Giofre is adamant. "That will never happen. The airwaves are free."

Whether a slight mutation or a total metamorphosis, some degree of change is in the wind. Giofre's concluding statement is key for any industry facing progress: "The trick is to adapt."

ITEM OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

Another union shop pr firm is Unicom (Union Com'ns Corp, St. Louis). Specializing in working for labor unions, its employees are all members of Newspaper Guild or Office & Professional Employees. The full service firm says it does about everything one would expect, from basic services to planning & strategy -- plus "providing tools to beat slick anti-union consultants."

Viewers who once had only 3 networks, PBS & a few independents now have scores of channels from which to choose. Selkowitz says to expect networks to possibly specialize their programming (health, business, etc) like many cables do now. "In the next 20 years, we'll define network tv differently. I believe it will not exist in its current form."

pr reporter

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EVERY ORGANIZATION HAS A SENIOR OR "AGING" PUBLIC AS CONSUMERS, EMPLOYEES, RETIREES OR POLITICAL SEGMENT; NEW DATA SAYS WE'RE NOT REACHING THEM IN A WAY THEY CAN ACCEPT

Sudden discovery of senior citizens by mass media -- major recent coverage by NBC, Newsweek, Inc, Technology Review illustrates range of interest -- makes it important for organizations to review their stance toward this vital group. New study by Daniel Yankelovich Group for Markle Foundation helps.

"They don't want to think of themselves as old," Edith Bjornson of Markle told prr. "They don't even want to be classified as a market. Many regard themselves as 15 years younger. Remember that mindset." Earlier study (pr 10/11/82) found those 60+ view themselves as at least 15 years younger.

In communicating to seniors, Bjornson advises focusing on their chief concerns:

1. Need to socialize -- support their ability to be "out & about"
2. Health -- preventative maintenance rather than medication
3. Attractiveness -- they like to look & smell pretty like everyone else
4. Security -- they respond to things that remove their fear of being helpless
5. Independence -- anything that increases this is of enormous value
6. Retirement -- not viewed as pulling back from life, thus "distinction between people over 65 & under 65 is growing more blurred"

Older people are not resistant to technology, as the myth has it. Much new tech simply doesn't meet their needs, finds Markle study. Says Ken Dychtwald of research firm Age Wave (Emeryville, Calif): "Computer companies think older people aren't interested in computers & can't use them -- a profound mistake. Every computer company in America is trying for that 1%, 3%, 6% of the 40-and-under generation, when they could have 50% of the 40-and-up market for the asking."

3 Major Problems

1. Products & services often don't respond to seniors' needs: One of the biggest problems reported by seniors is too much time on their hands. Therefore, devices which save time & eliminate tasks are not attractive to them -- at least, not for those reasons. "Actually," reports Bjornson, "we were surprised to find that many older people purchased microwaves because they heard they retain the vitamin content in foods. They were not attracted to them for the sake of convenience, but rather for health reasons."



The survey also finds that seniors have a need to be out & about socializing, therefore techs such as VCRs (I'd rather go out to a movie) and automated bank tellers (I enjoy standing in line, meeting people & chatting with my tellers) are not popular. Bjornson says better to capitalize on ease of use & enjoyment derived from products, rather than on time-saving benefits.

IMPLICATION: Size of senior market (29 million today, 40 million by 2010), plus its purchasing power, will force redesign of many products & services. Even doorknobs, designed now for young hands, will become levers to fit older hands, predicts Dychtwald. Research indicates the problem is not the attitude of seniors but mis-marketing.

2. Many communications & products stigmatize seniors as "old": Our society has been youth-obsessed, so naturally seniors are going to resist things that make them appear old. But beyond that, why is there a sterile, antiseptic message associated with hearing aids, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.? New devices are having trouble shaking the same stigma. Many seniors think of sound-activated light switches, alarm-wired pill boxes and closed-caption decoders as emblems of age. Often communications add to this feeling (see pr 7/20/87)

Frank Bowe, in Technology Review, says companies aiming products & services at the senior market must overcome "the difference factor." They "must devise marketing strategies that convey the benefits of a product without giving seniors the impression that the product will make them look or feel different than others." To make products attractive to older consumers, some products need to hide the differences between users & non-users.

3. Seniors best respond to messages sent in the mainstream: They do, after all, comprise a giant public. David Cunningham of AARP points out some organizations that have already incorporated them in their mainstream marketing. He cites Mitsubishi's depiction of a grandmother buying a headset, AT&T ad which features mature long-distance lovers.

Another Big Impact Is On Middle-Aged "Crunch" is word study uses, caught between caring for kids & parents. They see the economic rug being pulled out from under them by this -- and by:

- A. Mergers, acquisitions & cutbacks that eliminate their generation's jobs.
- B. Termination or reduction of employee pension plans & retirement programs.
- C. Their belief Social Security won't be able to pay them as much as it does now.
- D. Lack of savings due to college tuitions, their own high living expectations.
- E. Malaise caused by evidence their kids face bleak economic prospects, may be dependent on parents forever, e.g. can't afford to buy houses in current market.

This mindset has major implications for reaching this even-larger public.

EMPLOYEES LEARN BEST WHEN OUT IN THE FIELD, (OR WOODS) FINDS L.L. BEAN

Kilton Andrew, dpa, told prr Bean employees group together & embark on adventure hikes: kayaking, canoeing, ice climbing, etc. The "Outdoor Experience Program" strengthens the organization.

Here's how:

1. Enriches product knowledge: using products first-hand enables employees to advise customers. "When a guy calls to ask what kind of gear he should bring with him on his rock climbing trip, it's easier to help him if you have done it yourself & know his needs."
2. Tests merchandise: company gets to try out products on in-house advisors. Workers who have used Bean rain gear while hiking in monsoon-like conditions along the Appalachian trail are qualified to adequately critique the products & offer suggestions to the developmental division.
3. Increases teamwork & morale: employees have the opportunity to mingle with co-workers & learn more about the business while outside the business setting.

The method can be applied to other organizations -- ice-fishing not necessary. How many of your organization's or client's workers have actual field experience in using their products or services? It's ideal for pr staffers. Cunningham & Walsh used to send all personnel out to use the products they created ads for. One week a year those on Sunoco pumped gas. They said it was invaluable in discovering what customers want & need.

OEP results in a cohesive group of employees who have extensive knowledge of their product line & are aware of the needs of even the most demanding customer.

COMMUNICATION OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS INEFFECTUAL IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS; STUDY SUGGESTS ENLISTING PR DEP'T

Many organizations that invest much time, energy & creativity in communicating to the public are remiss in getting messages to their employees. Consider benefits. Often employees are simply handed forms & a booklet (summary plan description). The forms are completed without any real understanding & the booklets are stashed in the back of an office desk or at home in the strong box. The result is that money spent to provide visible benefits is wasted.

Buck Consultants (Secaucus, NJ) conducted a survey of how benefits are communicated & administered. "In many organizations, bookkeeping people are responsible for it," Mary Poker-Page, mgr comn svcs, told prr. "I wanted to find out if the quality of benefit information increases if pr departments are involved." The study shows marriage between benefit managers & pr departments is harmonious because:

- A. Benefit managers complain they lack time & resources to effectively explain programs, welcome assistance from the pr department.
- B. Conversely, the pr department is eager to be an integral part of the management team. Often it is trying to gain recognition for organizational counseling instead of publicity.