

¶While 2/3rds say their companies have experienced a crisis in past 5 years, only a third have formal crisis plans & a task force that meets regularly to discuss potential crises.

¶Half (47%) define crisis as a time when company's existence or "image" is in danger, or a negative event causes company stock price or market share to decline. 37% define crisis exclusively as the company's existence being threatened.

¶Most (76%) of those who have had crises say their companies' goodwill & reputation helped mitigate severity.

¶95% say "good corporate judgment & the ability to make decisions quickly under pressure" was the most important factor in the company's favor prior to a crisis -- more important than good relationships with customers, news media, investors & other external audiences.

**Perceptions Of Media** 53% believe their companies would be treated fairly by media in time of crisis. 39% doubt they would receive fair coverage & 8% say it would depend on circumstances. Most would prefer Wall Street Journal to tell their story; 11%, New York Times; 8%, Fortune. As far as coverage from an anchorperson, 32% would pick NBC's Tom Brokaw, followed by 28% for Peter Jennings & 26% for Ted Koppel. Dan Rather of CBS received only 3%.

**LONG AWAITED BOOK ON PR RESEARCH, UPDATED CASE STUDIES BOOK APPEAR**

Using Research in Public Relations (Prentice Hall) by Glen Broom & David Dozier resulted from the Arthur W. Page Society's first project grant. It's described as "a user friendly research tool" that will 1) help plan & conduct research, 2) use research findings, 3) provide descriptions of technical research skills when you need them. The whole panoply is covered -- from research design & sampling to chi squares & random number tables.

This is the second book on pr research this year -- a harbinger? Other was Public Relations Research (Praeger) by Bill Brody & Gerry Stone.

The original pr case studies book, Public Relations Practices: Managerial Case Studies & Problems (Prentice Hall), by Allen Center & Pat Jackson, is the only volume presenting a broad variety of cases in detail. 36 true pr situations are described & illustrated under 8 categories: employee, community, investor, consumer & media relations; issues, crisis & ethics.

Perhaps phraseology is key to this survey. If practitioners are viewed as "communications officers," message deliverers, naturally CEOs would speak to policymakers first -- then tell "communications officers" what message to send. If practitioners are to hold policy & decisionmaking status, they must be more sensitive to such verbal suicide pills. Communication is but one function of the public relations professional.

Vol.32 No.46  
November 20, 1989

**WHEN AN INDUSTRY FACES REGULATORY OR ACCEPTABILITY PROBLEMS, CONSUMER COALITIONS CAN PROVIDE A STRONG LINE OF DEFENSE**

The trend toward neo-Puritanism is drawing backlash. Consumer groups are forming to defend their rights. One gaining a high degree of political clout & visibility is Beer Drinkers Of America, formed 2 years ago in New Mexico. Former lobbyist Kevin Kaplan organized it to fight a proposed state tax which would increase price of six-pack by 65 cents.

Simultaneously, the need for alcohol education -- especially on college campuses -- was increasingly apparent. Now BDA defines itself as a consumer advocacy & educational organization, boasts 325,000 members.

**Membership** Members, like beer drinkers in general, tend to be mainstream. "They're not traditional activists, but are concerned about issues like taxes, drunk driving. This is the US -- with just a little inspiration, everyone wants to get involved in the political process," says Tenney. Some join to fight tax, others because they're impressed by the "Party Smart" campaign aimed at young people. Average member is college-educated, male homeowner, over 35, a sportsfan. Many are doctors, execs, skilled laborers, retirees. 91% describe themselves as patriotic.

Recruitment is via direct mail, at state & county fairs, sporting events e.g. auto races -- never on college campuses. \$5 membership includes:

- 1) card, 2) quarterly copy of Heads Up mag, 3) a beer can cozy with logo,
- 4) enrollment in legislative action network, 5) discounts at resorts, etc.

"We find members by sophisticated targeting techniques, e.g. formalized surveys & direct mail tests. Proportionately, Wisconsin has the most, probably because of the beer heritage there."

"There are several groups out there who would like to see Prohibition reinstated," Larry Tenney, acct mgr, Nelson Ralston Robb (Costa Mesa) told pr. "We've made a significant impact against their efforts by issuing 'legislative alerts' to members whenever Congress or their respective statehouse is considering laws that would impact the beer consumer. We follow up with phone calls. At such times, an average of 25-30 handwritten letters get sent to state reps -- highly unusual on a state level. Congresspeople receive 50-75 letters. We're told we've made a significant impact in Florida, New Jersey, & Arizona -- a fairly impressive turnaround."

**The Role Of The Beer Industry** Few members are in the beer business, but BDA does solicit the industry for contributions. "We do receive contributions from wholesalers, but not many of our members are related to the industry. The fact that we are a consumer group gives us much more clout. Elected officials respond to handwritten petitions from constituents."

Still, the beer industry heralds the group as a boon for business. "This group has the potential to be a powerful consumer voice," Miller Brewing dpr Beverly Jurkowski told Arizona Republic.

**Party Smart Campaign** Perhaps the biggest factor in the group's mainstream acceptance is the program to educate young people on how to drink responsibly. "Party Smart" doesn't discourage or encourage drinking, instead emphasizes moderation, sensitivity to excess. It also encourages tough enforcement of drunk-driving laws. Methodology:

1. Educational programs are conducted on campuses, to civic groups, law enforcement agencies, other org'ns; education kits are distributed nationally; they contain lapel stickers, buttons, posters, brochures with "Ten Tips for Smarter Partying & Hipper Hosting";
2. PSAs, some award winning;
3. Speeches & presentations. National Education Director Nancy Olenick has a PhD in psychology from U of California, speaks frequently on addiction & alcohol problems;
4. Literature is used by law enforcement professionals, distributed on 500 college campuses;
5. Adoption of program by other civic groups such as Nat'l Jaycees.

Daytona Beach, to which students flock during spring break, asked BDA for assistance. "We're really looking forward to 1990. The area has had big problems with alcohol abuse. They've developed a task force made up of chamber of commerce members & city officials. Party Smart logo will be right up there with the city logo. Our literature will be distributed at hotels, passed out with welcome packages. We're also going to have a sandcastle building contest, a concert with MTV on the beach."

**IT'S ALSO A CONSUMER GROUP, BUT AMERICAN SMOKERS' ALLIANCE DOESN'T HAVE IT SO EASY** "Beer Drinkers of America gets some support from beer companies, as well they should," chr Dave Brenton (Nashville) told pr. "But we don't get any support from industry players." Brenton says tobacco companies are afraid of 'adoption,' wherein if you give too much to a nonprofit, the nonprofit becomes part of the company. The two would be held responsible for each others' statements, actions, etc. "We could be subpoenaed to appear in some liability case which we have nothing to do with." Instead, the tobacco industry cheers on American Smokers' Alliance from the sidelines.

Like BDA, ASA is concerned mostly with consumer issues rather than regulations like laws banning advertising. But one proposal on the agenda, the Synar bill, would prohibit couponing, event sponsorship, etc. "This troubles us a great deal because it will take money out of the consumer's pocket. The companies will survive whether or not it goes thru. If you think about it objectively, it makes no sense because it puts money back into the cigarette company. It's crazy."

**Membership & Recruitment** ASA gets exposure thru media, participation in radio & tv talk shows. Also uses classified advertising, PSAs.

Membership is 5,000. \$5 annual fee includes monthly newsletter which alerts people to pertinent issues in their area. "We encourage members to join together, share information, become involved with the political process by writing to Congress, state reps."

**Hard To Be A Health Advocate** Another thing BDA has in its favor which ASA does not is the ability to encourage consumers to "party smart" and drink in moderation. How could smokers encourage "smart smoking"? Can they ask each other to smoke in moderation?

"Many of our members have been discriminated against by employers or in some other forum. We keep finding ourselves on the back porches of America. Why should we be forced to stand out in the rain and cold, when it has been proven that the real culprit (of respiratory ailments) is poor ventilation in public buildings?"

"Well, we certainly encourage people to be sensitive toward and aware of nonsmokers. We are concerned about being responsible citizens." Brenton also asks smokers to be careful disposing cigarette butts. "For some reason, when anti-smoking fanatics walk down the street, they only see the dirty butts on the sidewalk. They miss all of the drink containers and hamburger wrappers lying around."

**SURVEY OF CEOS' CRISIS-TIME BEHAVIOR FINDS SOME BASIC PR PRINCIPLES HAVE FINALLY SUNK IN; BUT PR RANKS LOW IN LIST OF "WHO TO CALL FIRST"** Golin Harris (Chi) questioned 40 CEOs from major corporations to find out how they behave in crisis. Most displayed a commitment to openness & visibility, evidence that key pr tenets have made an impact. They advise peers to "take charge quickly" & "tell the truth" during crises. But their understanding is incomplete enough to be dangerous. Findings:

"4 of 5 would go to the site of a tragedy if their companies were responsible for fatalities, significant property or environmental damage;

"After learning of a crisis, most would consult CFO & COO first. Third choice would be a top legal officer, followed by the top communications officer";