

Wakefield is promoting SYTAYF to other schools, businesses via:

1. VNRs: 15 & 30-minute. Shown on PBS, at schools, Chamber of Commerce meetings;
2. PSAs: featuring star football player Warren Moon; the DC version, produced by Burson Marsteller, has Whitney Houston;
3. Speakers' Bureau: comprised of members of Houston Independent School District, American Ass'n Advancement of Hispanics, Shell spokespeople. "The speakers visit schools and tell them about the program. It's a model that we hope to replicate in other places -- the concepts are adaptable to any situation. And I think Shell speakers may start to visit other corporations, to get them involved."

Of Related Interest: Schools Can Use Hotlines As Well As Anyone, as Nat'l Ass'n of Secondary School Principals demonstrated at its convention in New Orleans last month. NASSP and USA Today reached out to parents & pupils across the US by opening phone lines for 4 days, fielding questions & concerns, promoting the 800 number with extensive newspaper coverage. "This was the most effective public relations project we have coordinated in 9 years," says Lew Armistead, dpr. "A major pr goal for NASSP is to demonstrate that principals are instructional leaders.... Not only did we deliver that message, but we helped people."

ITEMS OF INTEREST FOR PRACTITIONERS

Popcorn Machine Never Fails To Pull people to an exhibit. As if the machine itself weren't enough, plus the taste & the sound of popping, there's the aroma -- which sucks people up from competing exhibits. At recent Communications Day in Grand Rapids, jointly sponsored by 4 professional societies, Top Dog Productions proved it again with a bright red machine, with the obligatory glass top so you can see the corn being popped. For offering so much, they report rental & expenses are reasonable. Bags carried their logo & message, of course.

Current Harper's Offers Schlocky Interpretation Of PR -- what it claims is "current state of the public-relations art." Since "the Eighties have witnessed the flowering of the art of publicity," mag asked 6 definitely not-in-professional-pr "specialists" to put together pieces of a campaign for -- get ready -- the second coming of Jesus. "Six tasks critical to winning over American public opinion" are believed to be these by the editors: 1) developing a media strategy, written by a journalism teacher at Harvard [anyone ever hear of Harvard's J-school?!]; 2) writing a monologue for a guest-host appearance on Saturday Night Live; 3) redesigning the cover of the New Testament & 4) writing the jacket copy; 5) designing a contemporary wardrobe; 6) developing a storyboard for a tv commercial. "Remember rule one," it begins: "issues divide, images unite." Whatever happened to building honest relationships?

ASAE Says Seminars Now More Popular Than Conventions, because they offer a) specialized learning situations, b) smaller groups for more interactions, c) lower cost, d) less travel since they're held closer to home. Association execs' survey faults conventions because someone lectures at you while seated in a crowd of thousands. Over last 2 years attendance is off at both conventions (37% on average) & seminars (25%). (Study, "Ass'n Meeting Trends," \$30 for mbrs, \$60 nonmbrs, from ASAE, 1575 Eye St NW, Wash DC 20005; 202/626-2748)

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DEVELOPMENT VS. PRESERVATION -- HOW IS THE PUBLIC BEST SERVED? CASES ILLUSTRATE DIFFERENCE IN HOW ORGANIZATIONS ANSWER QUESTION

Case No. 1. Despite months of public outcry -- parades, pamphlets, candlelight vigils, fundraising events, demonstrations -- demolition of historically registered "Jobbers Canyon" continues in Omaha. 80% of the 6 blocks of old mill buildings have turned to rubble as ConAgra prepares its contemporary corporate campus hdqtrs.

Case No. 2. "The situation literally happened overnight -- New Year's week-end," Dan Harrison, dpr, Phillips Petroleum (Bartlesville, Okla) told prr. "On Jan 2, when we opened the office, the phone was already ringing off the hook." This because word got out that the restaurant which had operated from the old Baker-Peters house (Knoxville) was closed & the structure would be razed to make way for a gas station.

ConAgra's View Dpr Lynn Pheras says buildings are not considered historic even by their owners, all the noise is coming from a few protesters. "There's really not much of a controversy now. An overwhelming number of people in the community are in favor of the development. Many businesses are involved." She says project is Omaha's idea. "The city came to us & asked us to consider building on the riverfront. After investigating, we decided it would be best for the city & for us -- a catalyst for other projects. There's a new sense of optimism & excitement."

In '88 survey, 70% of Omaha citizens said they were in favor of the development, 16% were neutral, 13% opposed. "We certainly believe we're in touch with the needs of the community. We wouldn't be here if the city & county didn't want us here."

People For Responsible Omaha Urban Development Says Omaha has been duped. "That poll is suspect," feels pres Mark Himes. "The question posed to the public was, 'Are you in favor of re-developing the waterfront?' Most people are in favor of development -- restoration."

The dispute was not whether to develop, but how to develop. Preservationists hoped to see the area rejuvenated in the spirit of Boston's Fanueil Market, NYC's South Seaport. "Some people like old red brick buildings, some do not," says ConAgra chrm "Mike" Harper. "We don't want to have a publicity campaign. Our job is to our shareholders. I'm not running for mayor, I'm running a food business." In a televised appearance, Harper suggested the preservationists "do something useful like raise money for the Omaha Food Bank."



ConAgra -- which demanded Omaha destroy buildings surrounding site, thus creating a driveway from downtown to new hdqtrs -- considered leaving Omaha if the city didn't meet its demands. "The city is still shell-shocked by Enron Corp's departure to Houston," says Himes. "It's afraid to lose ConAgra." Further:

"Businesses were threatened. There was pressure not to become involved. We had to assure the 500 or so people who contributed that their donations will be kept confidential."

Building owners said they are being pushed out. "I'm very upset about them taking our building & giving us the choice, 'If you don't sign, the city will condemn it,'" David Powell, pres Omaha Paper told media. "I'm in favor of this area being redeveloped," adds Donald Nogg, pres Nogg Paper, "but not on the backs of 8 or 10 businesses that are being hurt financially. It could put us out of business."

"ConAgra is destroying the only history Omaha has," says Himes. "Maybe in New England, 100-year old buildings are not too impressive, but in Nebraska, they're all we've got."

Oil Company Popular deejay urged listeners to protest the demolition by calling & writing Phillips chrm. "People got involved very quickly. We were flooded by calls, about 300-400 letters, plus petitions. People picketed in front of the house, citizens task force of preservationists was formed," says Harrison.

When Phillips considered razing the abandoned house & cutting down 2 huge trees on site, it was unaware: a) of structure's historical significance; b) that the trees are landmarks. "We were unwitting victims. We didn't seek out this property, it was offered to us for sale. And when we decided to purchase it to put up a new service station/convenience store, we didn't know it would cause such a brouhaha."

Since Phillips did not yet own the site, city officials revoked its demolition permit. "We had already decided not to demolish the property. We wanted instead to be as unobtrusive as possible, to reach a workable compromise with the task force." Morrison says Phillips is well schooled in pr. "We've been thru a lot of situations which have required sound pr -- plant fires, takeover attempts, lay offs, sale of substantial assets, emergencies which called for communicating with communities. So we knew it was important to reach a workable compromise. We had several public hearings, press conferences, meetings with constituencies & city officials. We proposed moving the house to another part of the site -- an idea which did not satisfy the task force. Finally, we achieved a win/win situation."

"Before this solution can be realized, a) we must secure the necessary permits; b) we have to find a suitable buyer who will use the home for business purposes. If we can't meet these 2 goals, there is little sense in us buying the property because we are in the gas marketing business, not the old home preservation business."

Results: ¶House will remain on the property undisturbed;

¶Station will be relocated on the site so the view of the house from the highway will remain unobstructed;

¶Station will be redesigned, constructed in brick for aesthetic compatibility;

¶Phillips will remove only 1 of 2 landmark trees;

¶Phillips will seek a suitable buyer for the house.

NEW EMPHASIS ON EARLY EDUCATION YIELDS AWARD-WINNING PR PROGRAM

The man who wants to be known as "The Education President" may be helping to make it a more visible cause for organizations.

Or are they coming to terms with what they've always known, that the future of their businesses depends on the children of today? Shell Oil is funding "Say Yes To A Youngster's Future," a program originally designed by the Nat'l Urban Coalition (DC) to help minority children learn & like science & math. "The dropout rate among minorities is very high," Beverly Wakefield, Wakefield Assocs (Houston) told prr, "but they will make up 40% of the workforce of the future. Companies will need people with tech knowledge, strengths in the sciences -- so they're starting to get involved in elementary, as well as secondary, education."

She says trend is due in part to increasing evidence that attitudes about learning are solidified in the early grades. "The thinking now is to catch children very early so they don't have a chance to turn off, develop anxiety."

How It Works SYTAYF, for children K-6, has been in progress for 2 years at 19 schools (10 in DC, 9 in Houston). All are predominantly minority, have low scores on nat'l tests in the past. Program is held on Saturday AMs in school gym or cafeteria. "Tables are everywhere, lots of noise & color, a science fair atmosphere," says Wakefield. 2 components are key:

1. Parental Participation -- "Children must be accompanied by a parent or an older sibling. The support from the parents has been great. Many of them are from economically depressed households, many are single, but they find time and enthusiasm to participate in this aspect of their child's learning. In Texas, many of the parents are Hispanic, and they say the program is helping them with their English" -- an unexpected side benefit.
2. Learning Manipulatives -- "Science is made unintelligible by textbooks. We use familiar household manipulatives, e.g. vinegar, spaghetti, water, beans, to test such things as the effects of carbon monoxide gas, other chemical & physical principles. Wooden beads are helping kids learn algebra."

Wakefield says program is Enlightened Self Interest: "The million-dollar grant from the Shell Fndn will run out, but we're hoping other companies will get involved. One motivation is goodwill, but there is also a selfish reason: to ensure a viable workforce for the future. Students enrolled in this program are doing much better than they were 2 years ago -- scores are higher, attitudes are better." Program won Silver Spur from Texas PR Ass'n.