

Media: "They usually come to us. Bats are mysterious & intriguing, so the press is always looking for stories, especially around Halloween." Nova & Nat'l Geographic have aired specials on bats & BCI, & pres Merlin Tuttle has appeared on several talk shows. "Now the movie 'Batman' keeps us busy with calls from the media & the general public." (Bat info packet available from BCI, P.O. Box 162603, Austin, TX 78716-2603; 512/327-9721.)

NEW STATE LAW HAS CONN. PRACTITIONERS IN A STIR; TAXES PR, BUT EXEMPTS SPACE & TIME COSTS AND SERVICES RELATED TO DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA ADV'G A Connecticut law imposing 8% tax on pr services is causing confusion & disgruntlement among

practitioners. "You can bet the newspapers lobbied hard to keep the tax off ad placement," Norm Fenichel, pres Norm Fenichel & Assoc (Bloomfield), told pr. "The whole thing seems ridiculous."

What It Says The law, effective July 1, taxes pr services: "business analysis, mgmt & consulting..." but also "...preparation of material to influence the general public or other groups on behalf of clients." Advertisers, however, while continuing to pay tax on production (photog, talent, etc.) are exempt from paying for creative development of material used for billboard, newspaper & radio.

What It Means "The burden of these new laws will fall on small businesses, and that includes small pr firms," Ira Gellen, pres First Experience Communication (Glastonbury) told pr. "What it means is that if an advertiser puts together an ad, s/he isn't taxed for it. But if I compose a brochure for a client, I have to pay," says Fenichel.

Gellen agrees that media brought out the big guns to pressure lawmakers. But Patty LaShane, lobbying firm Sullivan & LaShane (Hartford), says practitioners didn't get together to fight the law until it was too late. Meanwhile, advertisers & media formed an active coalition.

Fate Of Tax Debated "They tried it in Florida & had to rescind it. But now other states are interested in adopting similar laws." Doreen Rogers, pres Conn Valley Chapter PRSA, says practitioners haven't felt the brunt of it yet -- right now they're trying to digest the implications. (Copy of law from pr.)

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

LOANED. Geo. Fowler, who drove PRSA's landmark Body of Knowledge project soon to be published for practitioner use, to teach at Colorado State U. as a "loaned executive in public relations" from USWest.

DIED. Roger Williams, whose Creative Associates was a pioneering Northeast firm HQ'd in Portland, Me.

pr reporter

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CONTINUING PR EMBARRASMENTS RENEW THE MANDATE: PRACTITIONERS' FIRST RESPONSIBILITY IS TO MONITOR, & BE FULLY INVOLVED IN, DAILY OPERATIONS -- OR ELSE!

Proactive public relations begins in continually investigating the daily routine of the organization -- yes, even if that means "getting in the way" of line execs. Everyone agrees sound media programs no longer mean sitting around waiting to answer journalists' inquiries. Instead, strategic publicity plans deliver the info to them. The same approach applies here. Instead of waiting for gaffes to occur -- damaging reputations & bottom-lines -- pr can monitor operations for impact on reputation & relationships.

Why Monitoring Ops Is Justified 1. Short-term profit management is short-sighted. Valdez spill, TMI, Love Canal, Bhopal can wipe out a decade's profit, maybe cripple or kill the org'n.

2. Every outfit, whatever its size, has its made-to-measure version of such a disaster waiting to happen. Practicing public relations means having all the possibilities charted & monitored.

3. Even in a micro sense, little goofs that lose customers are too costly to put up with. It is 5 times more expensive to get a new customer than keep a present one (pr 5/30/88).

4. Operating employees are the organization. Their routine interactions with one another & with external publics is where public relationships are made or broken. Publications, advertising, publicity, opinion leader projects -- nothing can override this. You can spend millions telling me your product/service is superb, but when I experience a lapse in your claims, all your fine words have in fact made it worse. Shouldn't pr have a role in checking to see that quality is "as advertised"?

5. Doesn't pr have an ethical problem when it tells how great the product/service/organization is without being certain that it's true?

Public relations is under criticism for being a band aid pasted on after the screw up. Biz author Moira Johnston in a speech to California's Commonwealth Club: "Exxon, I suspect, sees [the Valdez spill] as a ghastly nightmare. Yet Exxon's primary mandate is still to make a profit. Like most corporations, it has not absorbed global social responsibility into the pores & bloodstream of its culture; it still manages ecological disaster as a pr problem. It is not alone."



Corollaries 1. This is why pr must be part of the CEO's office, cannot be relegated to marketing or hidden down the organization. This assignment requires clout only available at that altitude.

2. Like it or not, pr thus returns to being "the conscience of the organization" -- or, if you prefer, the inspector general. It needs be so because relationships are at stake -- pr's basic responsibility.

3. Ethics & culture programs are pr's cutting edge. It takes both for smooth ops since some folks will just mess up, others do it willfully. Which was at work when computer tapes of the spill were erased at Exxon's Houston office?

4. Participative techniques like Customer Satisfaction Models (pr 5/30/88) & Constituency Relations (pr 6/15/87) help deal with the fact most issues/crises arise from glitches in common operating procedures.

"My Organization Right Or Wrong Is Not Loyalty But Disaster" Some argue they must go along with what senior managers are doing. If so, this is indisputable evidence public relations values are not part of decisionmaking. Or that practitioners are not persuasive counselors. Or daren't risk doing the whole job -- which is to add value by bringing a different perspective to bear. (It will be instructive to see whether Exxon pr folks are scapegoated to cover up managerial failures.)

The Valdez incident is a learning laboratory for practitioners. Even after the spill, when statement after statement proved untrue, the company was caught out once again when the ship -- loudly proclaimed clean -- was barred from San Diego harbor because it was again leaking oil.

Seabrook nuclear station, finally granted low power testing, immediately has an "incident" -- involving failure in normal operating procedures -- & is shut down by NRC. PR has to deal with it, but was PR involved in decisions that might have avoided it?

2 Other Tactics A. Issue Anticipation Teams can involve operations managers as members. By including operations monitoring as a key IA focus, they may well be the ones who notice the weak spots -- which pr has thus helped to fix without taking the heat.

B. Feedback systems, whether tough stuff like whistleblower programs or easier items like hotlines, provide a mechanism for involving operations workers in stopping problems before they occur. A side benefit is the impact on employee morale.

"The real causes of the Exxon Valdez disaster were pedestrian," says Alaska's official report. "There were simply arrogant & complacent people at the top levels of Exxon Shipping Co. & Alaska Pipeline Service Co." Practitioners must be the gadflies, assumption deflators, complacency destroyers. No one ever said professional pr would be easy!

CAN REPUTATIONS BE REVERSED? CONSERVATION GROUP TRIES TO SELL PUBLIC ON THE BEAUTY OF BATS How do you rectify the reputation of a much-maligned person/image/org'n... or creature? Since '82, Bat Conservation Int'l has tried to unearth layers of bad publicity & negative lore -- centuries old -- surrounding bats. "Much of what the public hears about bats is myth," pub info dir Cindy Lynde told prr. Some clarifications: a) bats are not rodents -- they are more closely related to people than to mice; b) they are clean, usually rabies-free -- more pet dogs are rabid; c) they are not blind & do not become entangled in human hair.

Problem: How To Get People To Stop Killing Bats Tho bats are highly beneficial to humans (they're vital to research & the food chain), they are being killed off by the squeamish & uninformed. Countries where bats are of obvious economic value seldom give them legal protection. Extermination seriously threatens environmental health & several economies.

Behavioral Programming "Rather than target the general public, we focus on audiences that directly impact bats," ed dir Pat Morton told prr:

1. Educators - We distribute a slide & video program, activity packages for primary & secondary students. We also collaborate with museums, parks, nature centers for traveling exhibits for children.
2. Veterinarians/Public Health Officials - We're about to produce a book which will address health issues concerning bats, procedures for a bat bite, rabies, etc.
3. Legislators - to push laws against pesticides fatal to bats, BCI lobbies, attends senate meetings, etc. "We were successful in Wisconsin, & other states followed suit."
4. Others - including amateur cavers, who often disturb bats during critical times, Latin Americans involved with vampire control, conservation planners, animal rehabilitators.

BCI's purpose is to document & publicize values & conservation needs of bats; assist with mgmt initiatives worldwide. Employing only 12 in its Austin hq, the small budget nonprofit relies heavily on its 8,000+ members to get the message out. Morton: "When there is a need, we are able to pull a remarkable amount of support from members."

Techniques Informational Tools: bat houses (for the backyard) are available, with instructions in various languages. Also: bat jewelry, books, brochures, informational packets, slides & videos; bumper stickers, posters, t-shirts, mugs, stationary.

Corporate Involvement: Bacardi Imports uses a bat trademark. "We asked them to collaborate with us on a humorous bat booklet. Pres of Bacardi became very interested in bats & joined our board of directors. Members of an ad agency who worked on the booklet joined BCI.