

PR's challenge: **finding ways to maintain productivity, pride, teamwork & loyalty that reach beyond these economic realities.** Studying education, NPOs, gov't & similar sectors where money is not the attraction may be a valuable starting point -- especially for corporations, who have too often acted as if the only motivator was money (despite reams of studies to the contrary).

ANOTHER ATTEMPT TO PREPARE PUBLIC FOR IMPENDING DISASTER; THIS TIME, SCOPE IS BROADER

Calif Governor's Office of Emergency Preparedness found preparing residents for earthquakes (pr 4/24/89) a formidable challenge best met with a humorous approach. Think of the task cut out for American Ass'n for World Health. Its goal is to educate the entire US on how to prepare for all kinds of catastrophes -- floods, hurricanes, volcanoes as well as quakes.

Culmination of a year's research will be World Health Day (4/7), marked by fairs, poster contests, lectures & seminars. "We have already sent out 40,000 kits (listing ideas, safety instructions, network of contacts, etc.), to high schools, elementary schools, corporations, libraries & colleges across the country," project mgr Laura Gil told prr. She says topic, "Disaster Preparedness & Relief," is a novel one in the health field.

RESISTANCE OCCURRING Tho the topic is popular with many, especially the corporate sector which is eager to educate employees, others are rejecting it outright. "Some say it isn't appropriate for their state. So as an alternative, we're offering them kits on how to deal with technical disasters," e.g. utility mishaps. "Others say they'd rather focus on another topic altogether, so we've also developed a kit on health & the environment.

Some institutions have opted for less disturbing topics. "Some **schools think kids will get too scared**, especially since the war just ended." Gil was surprised that malls had hosted fairs for Calif's "Beat the Quake" campaign. "It's very hard to get a commercial place to put on something dealing with disasters."

Tactical query: This has to be one of the most difficult awareness campaigns imaginable. Will these conventional information techniques reach audiences? Will mailing kits arouse interest? (For materials, call Gil at 202/265-0286)

ITEM OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

Mea Culpa Theme Is Taken To The Limit by Public Service Co of New Mexico, which has launched a \$340,000 media blitz to apologize to customers and promise improvement. "From the Heart" includes tv spot featuring co pres confessing, "You are not alone. Our employees are frustrated, our managers are worried & a lot of our customers are angry." Full-page newspaper ads take the same tack. Apology campaigns have been used before; Holly Farms devoted an entire AR to telling customers it had screwed up. But PNM takes a bold approach by addressing the broadest audience possible.

WHY OLD RESEARCH METHODS ARE PROVING LESS & LESS ABLE TO GATHER THE ACTIONABLE INFORMATION PRACTITIONERS NEED

The classic research model, especially for the real pros in American Ass'n of Public Opinion Research, has been voting behavior. Resulting **polling method** has been adopted by politicians to the point of dangerous misuse. Polls to them are "instant democracy" -- and they appear totally ignorant of how easily polls can be manipulated (simply by fudging the questionnaire or sample) or be just plain wrong (new events change minds or the methodology is flawed). To many officeholders, the question isn't whether an idea is sound or a person/organization is capable & honest, but how the polls rate them -- today (which may change overnight).

Politicians may be able to get away with this abdication of responsibility -- let the polls decide, then blame them if it goes wrong. PR practitioners cannot, and so are seeking other means of getting the info they need to aid decisionmaking, in a form that more accurately models the real world.

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES TAKING CENTER STAGE

To market researchers, the **attitudinal model** has been premier -- but that is being questioned. American Marketing Ass'n held its 1st Annual Behavioral Research Conference in January, preceding its 21st Annual Attitude Research Conference. However, latter was titled, "Axioms Under Review: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom of Marketing & Attitude Research." The debate is on, spurred by new tech "behavioral" studies, e.g. bar code scanner results from check-out stands & cashier desks. The weakness is that this measures past behavior & has doubtful predictive value.

The major flaw in conventional polling & market research is they assume respondents will act according to their opinions or attitudes. Behavioral studies show that as high as 90% of people who feel this way or that will, in fact, do nothing about it in most instances. The object is not, therefore, to measure public opinion -- but **actionable public opinion**: A) who is strongly enough involved in the subject to do something and B) what are they likely to do?

Tho we talk about publics "voting" for a product or idea, the metaphor is flawed. In an election, everything builds toward a one-time triggering event on a date certain. For 12 hours more or less you can either vote or not vote, then it's all over. Years pass before you can do anything to "correct" the outcome. But in product/service purchase, you can correct yourself the next time you buy. In a public policy debate, you can hold strong opinions and never do anything.

Further, in an election everyone (if registered) has the possibility of acting, so a correctly conducted poll may gauge prevailing sentiment at a point in time. Since the highest number of those who actually vote is 50% (in Presidential elections; in the far more impacting local votes, woefully lower) the problem of determining who will actually go to the polls remains. If your company sells tires, or healthcare, what good are general samples -- since they do not tell who will need tires or hospitalization, to say nothing of whether they're likely to get them from you.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF NEW METHODS Standard *statistical quantitative studies* (the academic model) are really intellectual probes, since they force responses into categories, usually presented by the questionnaire. They measure what's on the "printed page" of the questionnaire -- the suppositions of the researcher -- more than what's in the hearts, minds & actions of respondents.

Open-ended quantitative studies (the sociological/anthropological model) measure human nature as encountered in the real world. They allow respondents to design the findings without categorization by recording whatever they express. Often they "follow people around" observing their actual behavior. But they may be difficult to project across a public if they lack quantitative controls.

Newer techniques frequently eschew the conventional norms entirely in an attempt to get at data that is useful without "statistical callisthenics" or hefty coding & analysis. Delphi studies, focus groups, guided brainstorming & instant walking-around quota samples are some in use now.

MORE ARE DOING OWN RESEARCH Research is becoming like printing. Vendors do the production work after you design what's to be produced. Practitioners are not only drafting research objectives but writing questionnaires & analyzing responses. Production houses are available nearly everywhere to 1) do the "fieldwork" whether it be mail, phone, mall intercepts or in-depth interviews, 2) select samples, 3) code & enter data, then manipulate it into the required reporting format. Formerly only research houses had this array of capabilities.

A call to **audit market research providers** was made by one research manager in the journal, Marketing Research. Mistakes & even forged data are no longer uncommon; much research is bought on price, which can make quality suspect; fancy sales techniques have been adopted by research houses -- so, "independent auditing would go far toward building trust." CPA firms now have this procedure in place.

Once arcane tabulating & analysis methods like SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences) are now available for PCs. To stay closer to the process & thus better understand the findings, practitioners are doing their own studies -- even quantitative ones. Springing up to assist are a new group of **research consultants**, often one-person or small shops who do what their name implies -- consult with clients on the most appropriate methodologies, best vendors, statistical stumpers etc.

¶ Upcoming issues of prr will present details of the many new or underused techniques getting serious trial.

PR EMPHASES OF COMING YEARS PREDICTED IN GROUP OF STUDIES Predictions made in the late 80s about pr in the 90s often did not anticipate snafus like a war & economic nosedive. What do forecasters say now?

OPTIMISM 1) A survey of Pinnacle Worldwide shows 82% of members feel confident their incomes will increase or remain consistent in '91. "It reflects the **improved management perception of pr**," says pres Paul Fullmer (Selz, Seabolt & Assocs, Chi). "A solid pr program is very cost-effective for an organization that needs to tighten its belt while still increasing communication with internal & external publics."

2) 56% think their **assistance will be required internationally**. "PR can help ensure that the organization speaks with one voice around the world."

24 members of PRX International, another global consortium of firms, also express optimism. a) "**In a recession, the need for pr increases** as companies face more & more complex communications problems," says PRXI pres Sharon Weiner (Honolulu). b) Members also agree priorities will shift, with **issues management on the increase**, followed by community rels & environment.

Wall Street Journal agrees that pr will fare well in tough times, since "editorial mention is free" compared with advertising. Predictably, WSJ's focus is on marketing support & media relations and takes no note of pr's full range of essential, cost effective services.

OTHER TRENDS The Cantor Concern polled 61 high level practitioners, found: a) 2 of 3 predict **budget levels consistent with '90**. b) **Marketing support is slowing down**, business & investor rels is stepping up; c) Preparations for EC'92 have peaked & will wane in importance in '91. d) **Farming out projects to other firms & freelancers is on the decline**.

SALARY GAP NOT GENDER SPECIFIC NOR LIMITED TO PUBLIC RELATIONS; ANOTHER PR CHALLENGE Discrepancies exist across the board in all professions. US Dep't of Labor says people of the same age & experience working in the same field are experiencing an ever-widening gap in wages. A decade ago, for instance, young lawyers of similar age, education & specialty could go to NYC and expect similar salaries. Now surveys show one could get \$110,000 & the other \$42,000 -- a gap of \$68,000.

Another example: senior mechanics from big airlines show a difference of \$16/hr at Pan AM to \$21/hr at American. Driving the gap: declining union power which once maintained uniformity; stiff competition resulting from deregulation; shortage of skilled labor.