

ANATOMY OF A RUSHED, TRANS-CONTINENTAL PRESS TELECONFERENCE

To make headlines as well as comply with SEC disclosure requirements

regarding its recent acquisition, Borland International asked Medialink to provide a satellite-linked NY-San Francisco press teleconference the **next day**. "We were given the assignment at 6:30pm, Tuesday, July 9th," explains Peter Scharff, pres of Scharff Weisberg, a provider of a/v production & large screen computer display equipment. "Medialink needed a video control room, cameras, a complete sound system, lighting, computer-to-video conversion and related equipment, on-site in NY by 6am the next morning. The challenge was to instantly turn a Plaza Hotel ballroom into a tv studio complete with large screen computer display and telecommunications capabilities. The event also had to be accessible to tv stations, nationwide."

A "nerve center" -- portable multi-camera video control room -- facilitated critical interactive voice, video & computer communications. At 2pm Borland's CEO was discussing acquisition details, responding to audience questions and demonstrating software in NY & San Francisco, simultaneously.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **Environmental damage is the most serious business crime**, according to a survey of 1000 US adults. 84% say so. And 75% think corporate execs should be held personally liable. Other business crimes ratings: worker health & safety violations (74%); price fixing (60%); insider trading (40%). Survey shows opinions are similar regardless of age, race, gender & income. Follow-up survey will ask these questions of corporate execs to provide a basis for comparison. (More info: Arthur D. Little, corp comms, Acorn Park, Cambridge, Mass 02140-2390; 617/864-5770)

¶ **Safe Naming: A Case Study.** Carol Reuss, assoc provost, sends this follow-up to ~~t&t~~ 6/24: Meeting rooms in the William & Ida Friday Continuing Education Center, Univ of NC at Chapel Hill, are named for wildflowers that grow in the state. Facility planners looked for **memorable gender-, racial- & political-neutral names** for the rooms. Center borders a biological reserve managed by the University's Botanical Garden. Its staff enthusiastically generated a list of wildflower names. When final choices were made, a watercolor (done by a Garden artist) & written description of each flower were mounted outside the rooms to help Center's visitors orient themselves in the large building -- and to contribute to the Center's educational mission. The names: magnolia, redbud, trillium, dogwood, mountain laurel, bellflower, windflower, willow, azalea.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. Virginia Pie, 57 (American National Red Cross, DC). As a member of its Future of PR cmte, she devised PRSA's College of Fellows.

RETIRING. Virginia Carter Smith (sr vp, comms & mktg, Council for Ad-

vancement & Support of Educ, DC) after 16 years there.

PEOPLE. R. Keith Moore succeeds Smith at CASE effective 9/1. Currently he's special ass't to pres, comms & media rels, U of Cincinnati.

pr reporter

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ANOTHER MEANS BY WHICH PR CAN DEMONSTRATE PROFESSIONALISM IS TO ACQUIRE CONFIDENTIAL STANDING IN COURTS OF LAW

Some say public relations cannot demonstrate professional status until it is licensed -- most notably Ed Bernays, who has devoted the past several years to campaigning for it. But trust in gov't administration of programs is so low many reject the idea out of hand.

There is another way: **gain recognition in the judicial system as a confidential counselor** to clients & employers -- i.e., the right not to disclose in lawsuits the advice given. Only lawyers, doctors & clergy have it now. Their relationship is considered "sacred & confidential" between the professional and advisee. They need not answer, in court or deposition, what they discussed or what they were told.

Indeed, it is a breach of their ethics to do so. As a result, clients can freely discuss any subject -- even potential wrongdoing that may have been uncovered -- knowing that seeking advice will not come back to harm them.

Today practitioners must disclose. As lawyers crowd in on pr turf, this gives them a distinct advantage to be called on for counsel in the most significant situations -- when depth of pr expertise is critical for the organization (and few lawyers have it). The only out for practitioners is "taking the 5th," saying disclosure might incriminate **them**. Such a plea automatically suggests the client or employer is guilty.

WHY CLIENTS OF PR MERIT THIS TREATMENT

1. An organization's or person's **reputation is their most priceless possession**. Their ability to participate, to contribute to, to succeed in their society is ineffably linked to reputation.
2. But we live in a **litigious age**, when lawsuits are filed over the most trivial points. Many times they are bald-faced attempts to blackmail defendants by threatening harm to their reputations. (The courts themselves are the locus of the problem, and on that score alone should grant relief.)

The court of law is merely a means of settling disputes. **The court of public opinion shapes policy**, directs the future for everyone, and sets the place of organizations & persons within the society. If counselors in the former deserve the right to confidentiality, counselors in the latter certainly do. After all, the client being counseled is still under oath to tell the truth.



- 3. The grapevine, the news media, gov't investigators & others are **quick to exploit allegations**, and herald them broadly.
- 4. Even if they prove untrue, that fact **never receives equal attention**. Studies show the public prefers hearing bad news 7 to 1 over good news.
- 5. In such a dangerous climate, organizations & individuals deserve the **right to sophisticated counsel** in building & defending their reputations. And they should be able to investigate together any & all strategies & tactics, just as they can with lawyers -- without fear such discussions may put them in a bad perceptual light if revealed.
- 6. In addition: practitioners are the **mediators between organizations & publics**. For the benefit of society, they must be able to carry out these perpetual negotiations without fear of forced disclosure. Smooth functioning of modern society demands it. It is in everyone's benefit.

This is a reasonable extension of the right to privacy. And it would demonstrate for once & all that public relations is a profession -- meaning an integral element in the basic functioning of a humane society.

It would be fitting in this bicentennial year of the Bill of Rights for practitioners to attain standing as confidential counselors. The First Amendment provides freedom of expression publicly -- but in this case not privately, or at least not without undue risk of unnecessary disclosure.

JODY POWELL'S JUMP TO ANOTHER FIRM ILLUSTRATES PROBLEM OF KEEPING TALENT UNLESS THEY OWN A PIECE OF THE ACTION

He moves from Powell, Adams & Rinehart (an Ogilvy unit of WPP Group, which also owns Hill &

Knowlton, et al) to Cassidy & Assocs, where he heads a new unit, Powell Tate. He told pr decision "was the most difficult I've ever had to make because of the respect & affection I have for the people I worked with." Why do it, then?

He feels strongly that **management & employees are better off working for an organization where they have ownership**. Reasons:

- 1) "Management & employee ownership provides a level of **incentive** that just can't be duplicated any other way.
- 2) "As CEO, it gives you a significant edge in **recruiting** the best quality people.
- 3) "There's really **very little benefit** that can flow to a company like we're talking about -- a DC pr/pa company -- from being part of a larger, multi-disciplinary international corporation. What you end up doing is sending up a significant portion of your revenue. And the people receiving it are not in a position to provide you anything in return that is commensurate."

Also affected, notes Powell, are the ability to a) make decisions quickly and b) take a longer view. "One might think on the surface that being a part of a company worth hundreds of millions of dollars would be more conducive to these.... In my previous situation, that wasn't true. Now, the people in charge will be making the decisions, but those people will be myself & Gerry Cassidy sitting right here in Washington. I'm in a position of more flexibility, fewer people to deal with about a decision of investment, change of tactics, etc."

His name was on the door. But that may only signify putting your reputation on the line without the monetary & other rewards, or ownership. In a declining workforce, when pr may be lower on the worker "food chain" (pr 4/18/88), good people will be less willing to be "owned" when **they** could own. PR's Rule of Participation applies to pr pros, too!

WHICH MODEL WILL PR FIRMS CHOOSE?

In other professions, the workers own the

firm. This is the case with law, medicine, architecture -- even the large accounting firms. PR's model has been ad agencies -- which themselves used to spread ownership, until they got the idea of going public. That is the purely **business** approach. While **professional** firms must operate in a businesslike manner, their sine qua non is their professionalism.

There is a difference. If a professional firm loses its standing, as professionals, it's all over -- no matter what profits it has been returning to the partners. A publicly-held agency, conversely, can do most anything so long as it rewards the shareholders adequately. Of course they'll get skittish if the agency's professional work or values are under attack -- but not for its own sake, rather because that could affect profits & share value. Working out this conundrum is a clear trend in pr firms.

PRACTITIONERS, LOOK OUT: IS EC '92 STILL HOT? AT LEAST THE TECH INDUSTRY IS PULLING IN THE REIGNS

Big economic summit draws attention to European Community. But a protracted recession and the

uncertain condition of Eastern Europe have caused several tech organizations to put plans for EC '92 on hold, says industry-watcher Chilton Co. (Radnor, Pa). "Altho European development agencies say they continue to have inquiries from American, Japanese & Korean groups, economic realities are compelling many semi-conductor and equipment manufacturers to postpone or curtail their European plans."

Until recently, European investment was seen as a must and organizations were afraid of being locked out. But now the pressure is off as companies like Harris & Fujitsu postpone plans for plants in England. Storage Tech has put its Eastern European plant on hold. But organizations which already have established presences abroad, like Texas Instruments, Intel, Toshiba, continue to expand capacity.

This may not be the best thing to tout for your company/client until the picture clears.