

4. **Address niche audiences** more effectively. Not all Boomers are Yuppies. There are, for example, those who are under- or uneducated, or for whom English is a 2nd language. They may need to be reached, too.

#### HIERARCHY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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|---|--|
| 1. One-to-one, face-to-face   | 11. News carried in popular press  |
| 2. Small group discussion/<br>meeting                                       | 12. Advertising in newspapers,<br>radio, tv, mags, posters, etc.   |
| 3. Speaking before a large group  | 13. Other less effective forms of<br>comms (billboards, skywriters,<br>etc.)   |
| 4. Phone conversation   |  |
| 5. Hand-written, personal note  |  |
| 6. Typewritten, personal letter<br>not generated by computer                | "It is the responsibility of an ef-<br>fective public relations plan to<br>force communication <b>up</b> the ladder of<br>effectiveness, striving constantly<br>to narrow the audience to a manage-<br>able size, and to deliver the mes-<br>sage on a one-to-one basis," ex-<br>plains M. Fredric Volkmann, dpr,<br>Washington U (St. Louis). |
| 7. Computer generated or word-<br>processing-generated<br>"personal" letter |  |
| 8. Mass-produced, non-personal<br>letter                                    |  |
| 9. Brochure or pamphlet sent out<br>as a "direct mail" piece                |  |
| 10. Article in organizational<br>newsletter, magazine, tabloid              |  |

#### 2 PUBLICATIONS ILLUSTRATE ATTEMPT AT DEALING WITH ISSUE SEMANTICS

Semantics often define the issue, sometimes color the facts. Semantics' role in a

major controversy is illustrated by Words Of Choice. Published by Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, it addresses the power of language: "**When advocating for a cause, especially a controversial one, nothing is as powerful as the language we use.**" Whoever defines the debate has the battle half won." Book includes a glossary of terms used in the abortion debate, with explanations of what each connotes & its effect in the public debate. Other side may be forced to respond with its own glossary.

Another of its publications, Abortion and the Holocaust: Twisting the Language, takes issue over statements equating abortion with the Holocaust. "We believe it is a travesty to dignify the Nazi Holocaust by suggesting that it can be equated with the exercise of a freedom legally guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and affirmed by the highest councils of most of the major & many smaller religious bodies in America," states the booklet. Wherever one stands on this issue, this is an interesting technique for practitioners to follow. (Copies from RCAR, 100 Maryland Ave, N.E., Wash DC 20002; 202/543-7032)

#### MAJOR RISK MANAGEMENT ERROR CAPPED BY PHYSICIANS

AMA's Council on Scientific Affairs finds it not a wise use of funds to try to remove asbestos from build-

ings. AMA Journal report states: "The case of asbestos is neither the first, nor is it apt to be the last, of these seeming **misconceptions, imbalances & mismatches between scientific fact & the need for action.**" Asbestos cleanup has "consumed vast amounts of capital & human energy and may be of questionable value." Proposal: learn to live with asbestos safely.

#### CUSTOMER SERVICE IS TOP QUALITY CONCERN, STUDY FINDS; IT'S ALSO THE #1 ARBITER OF ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, YET PR HASN'T DEFINED A CLEAR ROLE FOR ITSELF WHILE OTHERS HAVE

While cutbacks, layoffs and "doing more with less" prevail in traditional programs, customer service programs are proliferating. A sampling of 238 attenders at IABC's annual conference found 28% have **expanded customer-related programs** -- even tho 37% are experiencing staff cutbacks & 36% are cutting back in new communication programs. Customer service/relations programs are cutting-edge and vital.

**HEALTHCARE TAKING THE LEAD** Unlike most nonprofits, hospitals began in the early 80s to think in terms of "guest

relations" -- when DRGs, competition, increased regulations & rising patient awareness began eating away at bottomlines. Guest relations evolved to customer relations when hospitals realized they have many customers beyond patients -- physicians, vendors, volunteers, employers, third party payors, their own employees. Success depends on meeting the needs of all these customers. As the new newsletter Customer Relations in Healthcare notes, "**rethinking your relationships**" can be revolutionary.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE ASS'N NOW GROWING RAPIDLY** In retailing, sometimes it's just how you

say it that determines whether you have a customer or not. Realizing that being able to return merchandise is a selling advantage, some retailers have changed their returns policy from "We do not accept any returns after 90 days" to "We will gladly accept your returns for 90 days." Sales shot up, according to ICSA News, published by **International Customer Service Ass'n** (Chicago).

ICSA, like Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals before it, seeks to professionalize this arena outside of, and distinct from, pr.

Customer service is the most popular type of quality program -- **prevalent among 7 in 10 organizations** surveyed by The Olsten Corp this spring. Customer service was defined as "a commitment to satisfying customer needs thru prompt, courteous service." Retailers & wholesalers lead the pack, understandably, with 76% having programs. Non-profits are at the bottom with 43%.



**HUMAN RESOURCE PROS TAKING OVER MANY JOBS, INCLUDING COMMUNICATIONS**

The Olsten study found hr this involved in customer service: responsibility for **communications** (79%), establishing incentives (77%), evaluation (77%), program management (74%), program design (74%) -- and **training** (84%). Do pr practitioners not realize managing customer relationships is the most vital aspect of any pr program? And they must be involved -- indeed, should champion such activities?

Failure in customer satisfaction can ruin the entire pr effort & investment -- so pr must be involved, if for no reason other than its accountability for relationships. That it must be delivered by employees, not directly by pr, illustrates again how the practice is moving away from doing it into teaching it, showing others how to build relationships.

Regular, course-of-business contacts, carried out by employees at various levels, constitute the **behavior** of the organization. Publications, media placements, mission statements & other communications pledging allegiance to customer service are only the **words**, the **attitude**. As Emerson noted, "What we do speaks so loudly no one can even hear what we say." It's the difference between image & experiencing the organization.

**GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IS AT STAKE**

"The Phoenixians invented money and they also invented customer service thousands of years ago. Yet today, we are **currently** in a service revolution. A revolution in the way we do business. If we fail in the service revolution, we will become a third rate player in the world marketplace," writes Robert Montgomery in The Strategy of Service. He defines customer service simply as "people relationships."

**OTHER TOOLS FINDING WIDESPREAD USE**

1. Telephone communication is cited again & again as a neglected area.

In addition to failing the customer service test by forcing call backs, rude manners, inability to handle complaints unemotionally & similar faults, many organizations waste huge amounts of time playing "telephone tennis," says **The Telephone Doctor**, Nancy Friedman. Her videos & seminars offer tips for dealing with the range of telephone communications problems.

2. Another star performer, literally, is British actor John Cleese of Monty Python. His **humorous videos** on customer service (and other managerial topics) are getting rave reviews.

3. **Research** to measure customer satisfaction levels is proliferating. Traditional pr research techniques do the job in several ways. A different approach, basically sociological or observational research, is used to evaluate customer service delivery. Many organizations report starting their programs with such studies -- as a design guide.

[For information on the organizations or tools discussed, call or fax prr]

**PUBLICATIONS ARE DYING FOR WANT OF READERS; ARE PRACTITIONERS HUNG UP ON HANGING ON TO THEM?**

Baby boomers (77 million strong) aren't

readers, according to study by Knight-Ridder. Newspaper chain found in the late 60s, 75% of adults read the newspaper daily -- that's 3 in every 4. Today, 50% (1 in 2) are daily readers. In the 18-30 age group, 33% (that's 1 in 3!) read a newspaper daily.

"If people aren't choosing to read daily newspapers...what makes you think they will read your publications which they had no choice about receiving?" asks Ellen Henderson, dpr, So Carolina Schl Bds Ass'n, in an NSPRA annual seminar session titled "Publications Are Dead!"

According to Steve Knagg, NSPRA pres-elect & session co-leader, research shows that in school districts **only 3% of the people** make up their minds through the publications you spend **80% of your time producing**." Other research shows only 10-15% of employees nationally read employee newsletters. But "90% of your district's image is communicated through school employees. If your employees are out of the loop...you have no excuses." Similar percentages apply to most industries. What to do?

1. **Use focus groups to find out what your publics want & how they want it.** Baby boomers study found they: a) spend less time watching tv news & reading papers than others; b) do read Sunday papers as much as others; c) say lack of time is reason for lower readership, not lack of interest; d) are likely to be newcomers to their communities so have less incentive to read local news; e) women Boomers read newspapers less than men. They want: 1) useful info directly applicable to their lives; 2) quickest possible access to it; 3) men & women have different values about what content is important.
2. **Focus content on issues of concern.** Study identified "hot buttons" (topics of interest to Boomers) -- working women, the workplace, parenting, real estate, environment, consumerism, careers, health & fitness. What are the hot buttons among your organization's publics? Ask them. Focus groups work well here (as do other research techniques).
3. **Repackage your content.** "Ask yourself, what is the purpose of this publication...and what good does it serve if no one reads it because it is too long, too dull, unappealing, etc." Some redesign elements being used: bigger body copy; no jumps; lots of headlines; more pictures of women; how-to charts/graphs; themed issues or sections, based on "hot buttons"; friendly look (based on focus group comments); lots of graphics, maps, color.

**Ask yourself 3 questions** before publishing another printed piece: 1) What is the desired result? 2) Is there a more results-oriented, but cost-effective way of handling the problem? 3) Will one-to-one communications solve the problem, sell the product, fill the need?