

public opinion polls of frequent flyers would be good ways to find out what customers really want. He challenged attendees to recall the last time an airline a) called in advance to say a flight was delayed or canceled, even though all ask for a phone number contact; b) provided backup for a missed connection; c) offered up-front compensation for lost luggage. "Service, not price, used to be the distinguishing characteristic between one airline or hotel & another. Today too much emphasis is placed on price & discounting."

¶ **IABC RESEARCH FOUNDATION SEEKS PAPERS ON USEFUL PR RESEARCH** for its annual competition. "Research is strategic to the communicator's everyday job, so we are looking for topics which can help practitioners be more effective on the job," explains Donn Silvis, administrator. Deadline is March 1 '94. (More info or to submit: Donn Silvis, Dep't of Comms, Cal State U -- Dominguez Hills, Carson, Cal 90747; 310/516-3662, fax 301/516-3779.)

¶ **OVERTIME LIABILITY EXTENDS TO ALL EMPLOYERS.** Flextime is beginning to generate fallout. Specifically overtime. Courts are ruling that companies trigger an obscure law when they dock the pay of a salaried employee who takes part of a day off. These employees then become hourly workers -- which means extra pay for overtime. And the courts have recently held that companies that take away accrued leave for partial-day absences are just as vulnerable to the overtime rules. Both an issue for pr to deal with -- and possible impact on practitioners as employees.

¶ **READER RESPONDS** to *pr*'s 10/25 coverage of PR Watch: "While Watch does make some good points, much of what it prints appears to be muckraking. It reads as though the editor believes corporations don't have a right, much less an obligation, to present their views or champion their causes with the public. When one writes 'in the public interest,' truth, accuracy & objectivity should be uncompromised." -- Joe Epley of Epley Assocs (Charlotte, NC)

¶ **TOASTMASTERS MEMBERS PICK 5 TOP SPEAKERS:** 1) Commerce & industry -- **Harvey Mackay**, author of *Swim With The Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*, et al; 2) Gov't -- **Mario Cuomo**, NY governor; 3) Inspirational or motivational -- **Anthony Robbins**, self-help guru, author of *Unlimited Power* and *Awaken the Giant Within*; 4) Educational or social -- **Rev. Jesse Jackson**, civil rights leader; 5) Mass media or arts -- **Nina Totenberg**, legal afms correspondent for NPR. Most important elements of a speech, according to the winners: a) know your audience; b) offer interesting info; c) believe in your subject deeply & d) be passionate about it.

¶ **LACK OF PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP** and a shortage of talented people are the major problems of the profession, finds a poll conducted at the Arthur W. Page Society's 10th annual meeting. These senior practitioners also feel the recession will have minimal impact with budgets staying the same (30%) or increasing (39%); and staff stabilizing at its current size (63%). 78% report using counseling firms. 71% say they will hold the line on expenditures or decrease them; 29% project increases.

BENCHMARKING PUBLIC RELATIONS: WHAT, WHY & HOW IT HELPS

"Benchmarking is the practice of being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something & being wise enough to try and match or even surpass them at it" -- American Productivity & Quality Center's (Houston) definition.

It's a tool in the TQ toolbox that public relations needs to use, says Sandee Smith of BenchCom (Mpls), to: 1) improve top mgmt's perception of pr; 2) improve effectiveness; 3) reduce or contain costs; 4) develop performance measurements; 5) ameliorate the change process.

Benchmarking is *not* 1) a mechanism for determining resource reductions; 2) a panacea or a program; 3) a cookbook process that only requires looking up ingredients & using them; 4) a fad. (See Robert Camp's *Benchmarking: The Search for Industry Best Practices*.)

ONE COMMON MODEL

Smith is benchmarking 18 natural gas & electric companies using a 28-pg essay-like questionnaire mailed to each, followed by site visits. Each will receive final report & recommendations specific to them. Project is looking at specific criteria within 5 key areas listed below. "As the questionnaires came back we looked at each of those 5 areas using a list of criteria -- what we think are better or best practices. We had hypotheses laid out ahead of time. Testing these hypotheses against the 5 study areas is how we went forward in the evaluation process," Smith told *pr*. Specifics looked for include:

1. **Customer Satisfaction:** quantitative, objective & reliable research using interactive, participative, 2-way processes -- engaging key audiences in as many ways as possible; mechanisms that include external & internal audiences; comms dep't involved in research planning & integration of the findings crossfunctionally.
2. **Linkage to Business Goals:** existence of an organizational comms plan; communicators involved in both corporate strategic planning & as part of the planning process within comms; how are others within that dep't & across the company involved in making sure comms is clearly linked to the business; dep'ts that focus on audiences & managing relationships more than function.
3. **Cost Effectiveness:** analysis/tracking systems to make judgments about costs (i.e., use an in-house printing shop or go outside); expertise within the dep't regarding what things cost & some ongoing process to help the dep't understand & be cost effective.



- 4. **Leadership:** top mgmt meaningfully engaged in setting comn strategy; communicators involved in comns planning process & working with internal clients to involve them in that process.
- 5. **Quality Products & Services:** how key messages are communicated; what measurements are used to determine how well messages are delivered & what behavior resulted as a part of message delivery ("we're not too focused on what the brochure looks like").

ANOTHER, BROADER APPROACH This is one approach. It makes an assumption that "best practices" can be identified by looking at organizations within the same industry. Jeffrey Nugent of Johnson & Johnson expands this view to include *outside your industry* or, in the other direction, *inside your organization* (see matrix).

Nugent identifies 2 kinds of benchmarking: 1) "recreational" (casual conversation with colleagues) which is just as productive as the 2) disciplined (formal) process. He offers this benchmarking matrix:

Benchmarking	Within Your Organization	Within Your Industry	Outside Your Industry
Results (what's being achieved)			
Resources (needed to reach those results)			
Processes (currently in place)			

Many benchmarking efforts seek comparative info by functional areas. Says the leader of one project comparing a dozen major corporations: "We've developed questionnaires by functions. It's important," finds Lois Hogan, Jackson Jackson & Wagner, "in planning the process, to remain open about the information you're seeking. When you search for specific criteria you limit your acquisition of data."

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: HOW HIGH SHOULD YOU AIM? Benchmarking has the potential to drive pr dep'ts -- and the field -- to mediocrity as well as to glory, if the wrong assumptions are made about what pr **can & should be delivering**. The key is to measure against high outcome standards:

not just messages delivered or even relationships built or maintained, but activities & structures most likely to motivate, reinforce or modify behavior

A common goal is using benchmarking to become World Class. As Smith, Nugent & others point out, a focused definition of exactly what this means must be developed. This suggests benchmarking may be most effective when used as a tool for reengineering the public relations function.

HOW MGMT CONSULTING FIRMS STACK UP VS. PR FIRMS

Fee income grew by 5.8% in '92, up from 5.6% in '91, according to a survey by Ass'n of Mgmt Consulting Firms. 100 of the larger volume US consulting firms responded. Firms specializing in **marketing consulting** showed the strongest growth (16.7%). Other findings:

- **Financial:** a) Net operating profit in '92 represented 17.7% of total fee revenues. b) Profits per partner at \$81,896 increased from \$76,250 in '91 (but didn't obtain 1990's all time high of \$108,994). c) Typical firm generated \$163,605 in fees per consultant vs. \$149,653 in '91. d) Larger firms were more profitable than smaller ones.
- **Compensation:** Average total compensation ranged from \$31,200 for research assocs to \$189,700 for senior partners. Senior partners' salaries increased with firm size -- i.e., firms with consulting fee volume of less than \$1 million pay senior partners \$95,194; firms with \$25 million+, \$276,945.
- **Fees** are down. Typical hourly billing rates are: senior partner, \$225; junior partner, \$180; senior mgmt consultant, \$150; mgmt consultant, \$121; entry level consultant, \$93; research associate, \$65.
- **Women** are making inroads into this historically male-dominated profession. Today, 38.3% of new hires at the entry level are women; 31.5% at the consultant level; 19.5% at the senior consultant level. 60% of the firms participating in the survey have women at the junior partner level (vs. 34.8% in '87) & 32% at the senior partner level (vs. 18.2% in '87).

(More info from ACMF, 521 Fifth av, NYC 10175-3598; 212/455-8231)

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **ARE WE DISSEMINATION PROFESSIONALS?** "It's official from the Univ of Georgia!" writes David Geary of Leadership Communication Counsel (Bolingbroke, Ga) in a letter to prr. "A public relations person hired at this university -- home of one of the oldest journalism schools in the US -- is called 'dissemination coordinator.' I knew academe wouldn't let us down and lead the way -- even outpacing wily politicians -- with a new & perhaps politically correct term we can use to replace others we and the public have used for years. When I looked up the derivation for the word *dissemination*, I was chagrined to see terms like 'widely scatter,' 'impregnate,' & 'apart.' However, let's see who'll follow this university's lead. Maybe we'll soon see titles like 'directors of dissemination,' learn from 'dissemination theory,' belong to the 'Dissemination Society of America' and be listed in *Who's Who in Dissemination*."

¶ **SERVICE, NOT PRODUCTIVITY, IMPEDES TRAVEL INDUSTRY COMPETITIVENESS.** And the industry used to be a leader in service to customers, Rene Henry, exec dir, univ rels, Texas A&M (College Station), told members of the Travel & Tourism Research Ass'n. He noted that focus group research &