

EDELMAN FLAP SHOWS PR NEEDS TO EXPLAIN ITS WORK. Wall Street Journal derided the Edelman firm for offering a Harvard prof \$2,500 to write a medical journal editorial it hoped to place for a pharmaceutical client. Firm admits contacting prof -- but notes such stimulation of viewpoint articles is common, says it would have identified client & fact article was arranged. But incident shows again the need to be upfront & clear. Practitioners know perception is everything. And perception of most outsiders (& certainly of media in such a matter) is bound to be negative.

PR VETERAN GERRY GEE COULDN'T GET HIS STUDENTS AT FLA AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL U, a traditionally black school, to stop griping at lack of on-campus internships. To get them to focus on ample opportunities elsewhere, he grabbed historical language -- &, he says, a term they use themselves in similar instances: "Anyone who doesn't take advantage of the opportunities that are there, or who doesn't make opportunities for themselves, may be guilty of having what some would call a 'nigger mentality' -- the sort of thinking that can keep us all on the back of the bus forever." Caused an uproar, on both sides. He initially resigned, then had second thoughts. At issue: First Amendment/academic freedom vs. political correctness. Some criticize his attempt to defend himself: he's saying he's a victim of the PC police. They say it's typical of whites so arrogant they don't know when they are hurting minorities. Says Gee: "I violated the first tenet of public relations. I misjudged my audience." It seems safe to state, after teaching there for 17 yrs, Gee, also an ordained minister, is not a racist.

NEW SURVEY SHOWS EXECS' CONTRADICTIONARY VIEW OF PR

What do employers/clients want most from pr? What skills are needed to become a member of, or counsel to, sr management? Florida CEOs, sr mgrs & company owners surveyed by Fla PR Ass'n & Creative Concepts in Consulting (student group at Rollins College) are caught between old media/writer view & strategic consultant view. Evidence Budd & Bayse (see lead) are right?

- **Most important skills looked for** in a pr pro: media rels tops list, research & training are last, *no mention of strategy* or similar.
- **Top execs most often consult their pr pros** on comty rels, mktg planning, org'l culture. Yet *strategic planning & budgeting* are close behind.
- 62% consult pr professionals as part of their *strategic planning* -- most often on customer rels, policy development, research & development.
- Respondents more frequently consult with ad, pr & mktg dep'ts (tie) than legal, finance or hr.
- **The 3 most effective pr functions:** media rels, community rels, customer rels. But promos, newsletters, internal pubs are last on list!?
- 79% agree pr can help gauge public opinion; 73% that pr affects profitability; 68% disagree pr is best used to remedy a negative situation.
- **How pr can help most** (among open-ended responses): (a) be a very vocal part of the organization; (b) develop media contacts; (c) *tell management the negatives*; (d) identify chief decision influences.

PR NEEDS TO BE RE-INVENTED, NOT JUST REENGINEERED: BUDD

The growth of our "multi-billion dollar industry" has come at a price, declares John Budd of the Omega Group (NYC). "It has subverted our *individuality*; it has nullified our *uniqueness*; it has stifled our *ingenuity*; and, most tragically of all, we have lost our spirit of *divine dissatisfaction* -- that irreverent mind-set many of us once had that regularly challenged the status quo."

THE PROBLEM "A lack of curiosity; of hunger. We're satisfied with our role. We have titles, staff, parking spaces & expense accounts. We see the CEO regularly (when he wants something done) & we're invited to the right meetings. But are we making a difference? Would we be missed? Would what we do be missed?" We need to challenge the status quo -- even our own, believes Budd.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO "It has been an article of faith as long as I've been in pr that we simply have to make senior management understand what we do & why it's important." Instead, "we need to educate ourselves about management, about their priorities, their objectives, their problems, their concerns (and these are as individualistic as the fingerprints of each CEO)." For example:

- Instead of the multiple constituencies of the 70s & early 80s, CEOs now focus on one -- shareholder equity & shareholder values (or their equivalent in other sectors);
- They worry about governance issues;
- Workplace litigation -- which has risen 2,200% in the past 2 decades;
- Workplace violence -- not only murders: 425 assaults & fistfights happen daily;
- Sec. of Labor Reich is edging into corporate governance, advocating shareholder activism. He's looking critically at the hiring of temporary workers -- which account for 30% of US employment -- charging employers are running away from their obligations (benefits, pensions, etc). Can legislation be far behind?
- New federal guidelines for sentencing white collar criminals. Prison terms are virtually mandated for CEOs in cases where previously they might have gotten a slap on the wrist. But a viable, in-house ethics program can mitigate sentencing. Isn't that pr's responsibility?
- The exotic work & family practices rules. Single adults without children have begun to talk about discrimination.
- CEOs are bringing in corporate psychologists to sort out personality & communication problems between top execs & senior middle level managers.

"Where have we been? Why haven't we sensed these problems?"



HOW MUST WE REINVENT OURSELVES?

"I envision a very tight ship -- an agile, very flexible, highly competent pr operation. A department comprised of 2, maybe 3 layers, not the conventional 4-6 (actually, a Conference Board prototype of a large communication dep't shows 12 levels). Under the umbrella title of dep't of public policy strategy there'll be 2 components: 1) editorial communication & 2) public policy/programming.

1. **EDITORIAL** will "attend to the high priority, high profile, high leverage communication needs of the organization. Staffed by fast writing, highly skilled, facile, expository & news writers & researchers. They'll focus on principal corporate communication objectives. Local divisional, or special departmental communications functions, will be the responsibility -- & budgetary obligation -- of the subsidiaries, units & major product line departments. All special, 1-time needs (eg, video production) will be outsourced.

"Think of this as the editorial dep't of any major newspaper. No attempt is made to cover everything that happens, only that which is interesting, significantly relevant to the readers' interest or pertinent in some way. The same criteria & standards can be applied to corporate communication IF one has the stomach to set high priorities & the discipline to stick to it."

2. **PUBLIC POLICY/PROGRAMMING** section "is the heart, soul & nerve center of the operation. It is comprised of the principal officer -- vp public policy -- & experts in 2 disciplines critical to sound public policy from a public relations perspective -- social science (either sociology or anthropology) & opinion research. They identify major issues & make recommendations on public policy strategic actions.

Their issue tracking system will "monitor & assess, among key segments of publics, the credibility & reputation of the execs & the organization, as well as the effectiveness of pivotal communication. You can't waste your time on coping with communication activities that a) either do not address high impact issues or b) do not promise significant opinion leverage. This is a serious judgment call; it takes guts."

EVIDENCE PR IS LOSING ITS VALUE?

"A Dumping Ground Without Peer," in current issue of Across The Board, written by a 20-yr corporate pr veteran, illustrates how "many companies have used their public relations organizations as 'turkey farms,' where they unload their square-peg executives, underachievers, or executives coasting into retirement" -- signaling "a lack of appreciation for the value of the function."

To corroborate his premise, Dale Basye found **only 1/3 of the Fortune 100 companies have execs listed in Who's Who In Public Relations** -- the directory of top pros. Instead, "figureheads" are leading many pr departments. "These unqualified vps are prone to readily accept ill-conceived & short-sighted cutbacks in their own staffs & budgets because they tend to see pr as a nonessential staff overhead cost that adds little to the bottom line." They are placing "their reputations & bottomline at serious risk."

MORE EXAMPLES OF POWER OF GOING DIRECT TO TARGET PUBLICS

To respond to media's incomplete or biased news report, use direct editorial communications with your organization's consumers, members & constituents. CommCore Communicator (DC) illustrates with these examples:

- Before ABC News' Prime Time Live profiled a **major hospital**, the hospital PR staff sent an unedited tape of the interview with the hospital CEO to all members of its industry association. The tape arrived before the piece aired, providing an interesting contrast to the edited tv segment.
- After a series of unflattering reports by a local tv station, the Friends of **the National Zoo** in Washington, DC, wrote to members & responded to specific allegations. This presented an alternate view of the circumstances, allowing members to see another side of the story.

This proactive response method is a powerful, personal means of getting your message out. Particularly in the face of criticism or attack.

BUSINESS CARDS: AN OVERLOOKED COMMUNICATION TOOL

Your card is usually the first tangible thing a customer/client will take with him or her after meeting you. Does it communicate the message you want it to? G. Lee Mikules offers guidelines on how to get the most from your card -- from design to distribution:

1. "Everyone is concerned about what is important to them *before* they are concerned about anything else. And *you*, as the one who hands them out, must realize your ego will clash with that of the person who receives your card....
2. "The person you hand your business card to does not care about your name or the fact that you have been in business for 25 years, or that you have every credential possible, and so forth.
3. "*The only thing he is interested in (because of his ego) is what your business, product or service can do for him!* Will it save or make him money? Will it feed his ego?
4. "You have to distill the essence of what your business is, and -- most importantly -- what it can do for your customer into a concise benefit-oriented, hard-hitting sales message." Then put that message front & center on your card. (Copy from Mikules, P.O. Box 864, Manitou Springs, Colo. 80829-0864; \$17 + \$3 postage)

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **NEWLY CREATED POSITION AVAILABLE:** dir gov't rels at Wendy's corporate hq in Columbus, O. Monitor key federal & state legislative & regulatory issues, help develop, implement & support strategies to achieve objectives related to public policy issues. Development & maintenance of databases to marshall grassroots lobbying potential is a key responsibility. (More from Julie Scott, sr hr rep, 614/764-3100; fax 614/766-3866)