READERS SEE LESSONS IN THE NEWT GINGRICH PRSA FLAP

Comments on his introduction of Alvin Toffler at PRSA's conference:

- "Our allegedly boorish colleagues weren't booing or shouting down Newt. They were protesting not Newt's message -- who hasn't heard it? -- but the inappropriateness of a political speech in the guise of an introduction. Didn't anyone preview Newt's introduction-cum-tract? **Experts as we claim to be in anticipating reactions of audiences**, didn't it occur to anyone that an audience would expect an introduction of Toffler to be about Toffler, at least by the fifth or sixth minute, & not about Contract With America? No, I didn't boo. But it was okay with me that they pulled the plug. Pun intended."
-- *David Therkelsen, Red Cross (St.Paul, Minn.)*

- "The pr practitioners may have been impolite & perhaps boorish, but they are only emulating the behavior perfected by the Speaker himself. Holding up Newt Gingrich as a defender of civility in public discourse is akin to holding up Madonna as the paragon of fashion. As a result, your report was sadly one-dimensional. Your inability to understand the irony of this event was disappointing.... While the Gingrich legacy may someday include the restructuring of the federal government, it will also include the coarsening of public debate & the cheapening of political processes.... Actually, I was more shocked that the president of PRSA is seemingly oblivious to the depths of the problem, & resorted to such trite phrases as 'wakeup call' & 'American values' in his haste to generalize the reasons for this occurrence. All of us in the public sector are well aware of the price that governance is paying as a result of the special interests & political firebombers who polarize & divide us. Ultimately, I agree with your conclusion that civil society is breaking down, and I share your concern, but **spare me the misplaced apologies to a creator of the problem that plagues us.**"
-- *Thomas Jones, Shelby County Gov't (Memphis)*

- "What could possibly be the reason for bringing politics to the PRSA conference? Don't we get enough of that already? I can't believe that the organizers couldn't find a respected figure from our own field worthy of delivering a message at the final plenary session. While I heartily agree that shouting down a videotaped message is unbecoming of public relations professionals, I am greatly insulted that Gingrich is deemed an appropriate 'messenger' for this supposed 'wake up call' that John Beardsley thinks we need.... **How could any pr professional take him [Gingrich] seriously when his message is so often lost because of his obnoxious tactics?**"
-- *Alesa Rottersman, Oak Ridge National Laboratory (Oak Ridge, Tenn.)*

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Anthony J. Fulginiti PRSSA Chapter at Rowan College named Outstanding Chapter in the nation for 4th consecutive time, 5th since 1986. Rowan competed with more than 180 chapters nationwide. Award comes on the 20th anniversary of the chapter's founding by faculty advisor Tony Fulginiti.

REENGINEERING PR MEANS LOOKING AT THE *TONE* OF MATERIALS

For that part of our work requiring communications products -- whether print, video or computer -- a different type of reengineering appears to be occurring. It deals with a) the tenor & tone of the presentation, as well as with b) information mapping, c) transparent communication & d) using these vehicles to stimulate face-to-face. The guidelines are:

- **Serious** materials & programs are solid but simple, definitely not slick

- **Sales** materials & programs tend to be slick, colorful, packaged

Understanding the difference is crucial -- and many seem not to understand.

FOR INSTANCE ...   Most employee newsletters are design-ey, full of color -- as if they were meant to be on the newsstand. This signals they are entertainment, on the one hand, or a sales job by management, on the other. Because these techniques are used in sales brochures & ads, where they may be necessary, we apply them willy-nilly to *all* print materials.

> New Englanders call the straightforward, honest stuff "studied poverty." As if you had the means to produce something "expensive" but knew this would communicate far better.

Materials explaining new organizational programs fall into this same trap. They look like, well, sales brochures or product description sheets. Implying, then, that the program can't stand on its merits but must be sold.

Computer communications suffer from overuse of the art file. Or from filling the screen top to bottom, instead of info mapping brief key points with bullets or numbers. E-mail et al are, after all, just print in another form.

THE RULES SEEM TO BE ...   Serious materials, offering substance, **don't need slickness.** Serious programs don't need special names & logos. What's required is simple, easy-to-understand, offering solid information, that is useful -- & therefore meaningful. It may look like a clean, crisp task force report or well done research summary. Fancy design features & slick stock detract from the mission...because they are inappropriate.

GE's reported dictum that **"written communications exist to stimulate face-to-face communication"** is correct. Memos, e-mail etc can sit for days, then be answered in kind -- which can sit for more days. A face-to-face get together stops great globs of cycle time being wasted.

Does this mean good design isn't important? Yes -- & no. If good design means applying rules of graphic psychology, fine. That's what info mapping is. If it means "art," it's a case of "Danger: designer at work."

> **People want to be served, not sold -- involved, not told.**

HOW TO REWARD EMPLOYEES WHO DELIVER CUSTOMER DELIGHT

With the need to *delight* customers, comes the desire to reward employees for doing so. The problem is, how do you link them? There is no *right way*, finds National Computer Systems in its newsletter *NCS Research Notes*. Given the myriad possibilities, it offers these basic research steps:

1. **Define your variables**, i.e. determine exactly what is meant by "customer satisfaction" & "organizational performance." Most measurement errors are made here. Also, examine the employee behaviors that *have* an impact on customer satisfaction. Ask your customers & employees -- they're the experts. When choosing your measure of organizational performance, pick one that *can be* affected by employee behaviors.

2. **Develop items to measure your variables**. For example, if your definition of customer satisfaction includes the phrase "is willing to recommend us to friends," you should have an item that assesses willingness to recommend. If a measure of employee behaviors is supposed to reflect "going the extra mile," you need an item addressing employee willingness to exceed expectations or employee behaviors that illustrate it.

3. **Content validate your survey**. Ask your experts to critique the items you've developed. Ask how relevant each item is to the definitions you've created. Then eliminate or revise as necessary.

4. **Pre-test your survey** with a sample of customers. Gauge reactions to its layout & content. Ensure directions & items are clearly worded.

5. **Implement a pilot program**. Roll the survey program out to a single business unit. Monitor successes & setbacks to improve your system. When you've worked the bugs out, implement it thruout the organization.

6. **Continue to measure** the variables. To assess the relationship between your variables you must continually collect data on all of them. (More from NCS, 4401 West 76th St, Edina, Minn 55435; 1-800-347-7226)

STATISTICS SHOW PRIMACY OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH

Gathered from secondary research by counselor & researcher Kitty Ward, they make the case:

- It costs 5 times as much to acquire a new customer as it does to take actions to keep a customer

- Almost 70% of the identifiable reasons why customers sever relationships with companies have nothing to do with the product, but with the service

- Only 4% of dissatisfied customers complain, but for every complaint received, 26 more customers are unhappy

- 65-90% of uncomplaining customers will never buy from the company again

    "What an argument for research to discover customer perceptions," she notes. Such research should be designed to learn:

    a) *why* customers think & feel the way they do,
    b) *how* they *describe* their needs & concerns,
    c) *what changes* the organization could make to satisfy their needs.

Results will show whether or not, & why, the organization's relationships are on track. Also how to promote customer satisfaction & loyalty to assure long-term success. "And people are reluctant to do research!?"

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶**Trend?? EU Outlaws Cold Calls & Unsolicited E-mail**, making prior consent necessary for telemarketing & pitches by computer. European Union's parliament is expected to ratify this month the recommendation by a key committee. Germany already forbids these practices, but UK has a thriving direct marketing industry -- which is screaming bloody murder. Some computer publishers claim it will also retard development of the info society in Europe. Since 'net searches are willful acts, it's hard to make sense of this position. Undetermined at press time is whether unsolicited faxes & research by phone are also prohibited.

¶**New Post-It Newspaper Ad Stickers Could Be Boon In Issue Campaigns**. Familiar yellow sheets -- tho much larger than notepad versions -- are as close to failsafe message delivery by media as appears possible. Stuck on page 1, their colorful message is the first thing one sees. Even readers who fail to open the paper don't escape the message.

¶**Humor Is So Powerful**. In Ontario, one suggestion for making workfare effective is to use local service clubs to help locate qualifying jobs. A wag wrote Toronto Globe & Mail: "This gives new meaning to the old Roman expression about throwing someone to the Lions." Who could support the idea after that withering comment?