

BASIC TOOL OF PR MAY BE GETTING REAL ISSUES ON TABLE

Of all the result-producing activities practitioners offer clients & employers, in case after case the one that makes the ultimate difference is getting the target public or the parties involved to enunciate what is really motivating them -- to act, to think the way they do, to perceive events in a certain manner.

- This **ferreting capability** never appears on skill lists, yet may be the quintessential core competency. If journalism can teach pr things, one of them is how to fashion a line of questioning that will elicit these realities (without the "microphone in your face" elements, of course).
- **Getting your organization to be open** about its goals & positioning is often half or more of the task. To be candid -- even honest. This takes counseling skills -- confronting colleagues in a way that still assures them you are on their side.

SOME INSTANCES EVERYONE FACES

- **Labor negotiations** are an obvious example, where hard bargaining around pay or benefits masks the union's fear of a merger or downsizing, or the company's desire to position itself to be acquired. Of course the company wants to pay its employees fairly, and of course the union realizes the global economy has altered things, but...

-- Here practitioners may contribute to the problem if they fail to question the sincerity of the official line. When they do, and get the real issues on the table, settlement usually follows.

- **Issue debates** are very similar, where public statements more often confuse what's at stake than enlighten stakeholders.
- **Working with opinion leaders** succeeds or fails on ability to discover what will truly get them to become third party advocates -- to do something, rather than give lip service. Uncovering personal motivations & hot button issues makes the difference.
- **Even in basic info transfer**, isn't the key our ability to find out what publics really need-to-know, vs. what's just passing parade data?

Until the deep-seated motivations & emotional feelings are on the table, it is impossible to deal with the situation. Certainly to deal in a way that has any staying power. Like psychotherapists, practitioners need to be able to "see into the soul."

ITEM OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **The number of news outlets in DC has declined since last year** for the first time in the 30-year history of *Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory*. Decline is traced to the 45 fewer newspapers listed (87 were deleted & only 42 added for the '96 edition). Overall, about 4,400 additions & deletions were made from previous edition. (482 pgs, \$185 including qtrly revisions; 3 1/2" diskette, \$295; P.O. Box 311, Rhinebeck, NY 12572; 800-572-3451)

RULE: DON'T LET WHAT THE OTHER SIDE DOES ALTER YOUR PLAN

The Northwest Industrial Sanctuary next to downtown Portland, Ore., faced a challenge when Costco wanted to locate one of its stores there (for the 2nd time, after an unsuccessful attempt in '89). City Council members had to decide whether a retail operation could enter this heavy industrial zone. Neither side could talk directly to Council members. Result was a public relations face-off.

In a face-off such as this, "you are stretched to the max. It's important to find your messages & stick to them. Don't be distracted by anything your opponents are doing. If you spend all your time defending yourself against your opponent's charges, you won't have time to make your own points. This key concept was vitally important to us," notes Stone.

THE LINE UP & STRATEGIES

On one side was Costco, involving people in & outside the downtown area -- relying on the appeal of convenient shopping for its customers. On the other, industrial companies focusing on "why the land-use laws had been put in place" & what the impact would be on those who own businesses or work within the sanctuary & those who live in surrounding neighborhoods, Susan Stone of Stone-Sheridan Group (Portland) told prr. Stone worked with the industrial companies to preserve the industrial sanctuary.

TACTICS: GLITZY MASS INFO CAMPAIGN vs. ONE-ON-ONE NETWORKING

Costco addressed the entire community in its attempt to sway City Council members. The successful membership merchandiser:

1. Hired consultants to do impact surveys.
2. Used direct mail including brochures, cards, glossy 4-color flyers.
3. Ran ads (12-13 versions) in daily paper, weekly business press, Daily Journal of Commerce, many community papers.
4. Distributed large, 4-color, glossy handouts at Costco Stores.
5. Sent numerous letters to its members.
6. Ran a massive postcard mail-in campaign directed at Council members.

The industrial companies took a different tack. They focused on policy issues -- whether Council members wanted to maintain the 20,000 inner city industrial jobs. "You have to choose your messages & make sure they're really appropriate. That they're what the community is interested in -- what benefits them as a whole. Then **stick to them & don't get sidetracked**. That's the bottomline," Stone told prr.



TOUGH MESSAGE TO GET ACROSS

Industrial sanctuary for years has done so well (less than 1% vacancy) it hadn't needed help from the community or the Council. As a result few knew it was there. "First we had to educate people there is an industrial sanctuary, what it means, why it's a neat idea, why it had worked when other cities were rotting at the core. We needed to tell people this is here & then help them understand what it is they would be risking, what the tradeoffs are. This was a complicated communication process." Tactics included:

1. **Delivering 2 fact sheets per week to Council members' staffs** -- a series done "fast & inexpensively." With the last one, all were bound together so they'd have the entire booklet. These were also delivered to the media & anyone with questions about the issues.
2. **Approaching the public at as local a level as possible** -- the neighborhood ass'ns. "This is a wonderful system, an extraordinarily lively democratic process where people get involved in what's going on in their neighborhoods. So we started there. A number of us working on this live there, so it was important to us personally."
3. **One-on-one interactions with neighborhood members** rather than mass mailings. "We didn't have an easy, mass-appeal theme. People had to pay attention & learn some things to know what was going on. We talked person-to-person & answered questions." Displayed neighborhood fact sheets in neighborhood stores. Also worked with neighborhood newspapers which were following this closely.
4. **Adopting a response mode with the media.** "But we had plenty of opportunity to respond because Costco's strategy was to turn this into a city-wide referendum -- running huge newspaper ads trying to get as much visibility as possible. We didn't have to start anything."
5. **Getting support on key themes from "a diversity of people to bring to life what the impact would be."** 4 key publics were targeted: 1) neighborhoods, 2) industrial companies, 3) their employees, 4) Portland's opinion leaders. "The breadth of the people who were concerned & testified spoke clearly about the serious impact that could come from this."
6. **"We did not attack Costco.** We kept saying over & over that this is not about whether Costco is a good store. They are a good store. But the industrial sanctuary is not a good place to put one." There was plenty of disagreement, however, about what the impact would be. "We basically ripped their numbers apart, finding them totally unreasonable." However, to do this meant they had to match Costco, consultant for consultant -- ie, Costco did traffic studies, the industrial companies had to do traffic studies. "It was an expensive process."

RESULTS

After a 14-month campaign, Council voted down Costco's request. Campaign garnered a residual benefit: strong awareness among the residential & industrial communities that the other is there, has needs, & a greater willingness from both to resolve issues when they arise. "We have the largest industrial sanctuary in the state directly across the street from the hottest residential community in Portland. It's a lot of work to keep those two living together happily. Now there's a new awareness & willingness to make that relationship work."

USES OF THE 'NET: TRY THE "INTRANET," LURE CLIENTS

1. **"What's new is the concept of the 'intranet'** -- kind of a closed-circuit internet for use by the members of a related group. Employees of the same company, for example," writes Al Geduldig (Geduldig & Ferguson, NYC) to prr. "The intranet is different from e-mail in that 1) you're dealing with a more-or-less captive audience, 2) unlike e-mail, you can scan & select from a menu, 3) the visual techniques are a whole lot sexier. My guess is that the intranet will have immediate acceptance because it will save companies great sums of money in publishing."
2. **The problem/consequence statement for firms:** "If our clients don't make use of this medium, they're going to be left far behind. If we don't promote our expertise, we're going to be left far behind," motivated Starr Seigle Group's (Honolulu) foray into internet seminars. Goal is to "convince our clients to have a presence on the web, so they will have an additional opportunity to influence their customers' behavior," notes Craig Miyamoto of ProComm (Starr Seigle's pr arm) in a fax to prr. StarrTech (Group's technology arm) runs the seminars.

HOW SEMINARS WORK

1. Clients not yet on the web are targeted.
2. 12-18 maximum (to allow for 1-on-1 interaction) are brought into the firm for 1 hr of intense presentation on the web, & 1 hr of hands-on web surfing. "I have a theory. If you touch something, you fall in love with it. We find that even the most fearful technophobes enjoy punching the keys & experiencing the joy of discovery."
3. During the presentation "we talk about how one morning we all woke up & everything we knew about communications was different. And how we woke up a week later & all of that changed as well. We are in a series of massive paradigm shifts. In the past year, it's as though we jumped from scratchy radio reception to full-color live tv in a single bound."
4. "We talk about some of the dangers we face because of this -- the wonders & horrors of e-mail, pornography, licensing, copyrights & other potholes along the info highway... Above all, we remind our guests (& ourselves occasionally) that it's great to be seduced by the web, but to keep in mind that it is in the end, just another medium of communication that will facilitate -- & not replace -- honest, face-to-face, 1-to-1 communication." (Contact Miyamoto for a copy of his "Potholes Along The Infobahn" at 1001 Bishop st, Honolulu 96813-3469; 808/528-3159, fax 808/524-1195)

A survey is used to evaluate the presentation, fine-tune the program. "The ultimate evaluation is whether or not we get any new business. Each session has produced 2-4 opportunities to submit proposals. We have converted all of them."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. Joe Codispoti (senior corporate pr counselor, Digital Equipment Corp, Maynard, Mass) at 51 from cancer.