

- "From a programming perspective, tv & the internet fight each other. TV is by nature a passive medium...the Internet is an active medium," notes Scott Ehrlich of Fox News. Is a culture war/culture shift coming?

READERS RESPOND ...

- **Perception or facts on the millennium?** Jim Wallace "can't believe Noel Turnbull wrote an entire book" without realizing the millennium starts January 1, 2001 (pr 12/16/96). Noel Turnbull of Turnbull Fox Phillips (Australia) responds, "The book makes it very clear that while the millennium actually starts on January 1, 2001, the mass perception will be that it starts 12 months earlier. In our business, which is more important -- recognizing the significance of how perception shapes reality or pedantically insisting the perceived reality should be ignored?"
- **Are pr societies keeping up with change?** (pr 12/16/96) Steve Shivinsky, Mercy Health Services (Farmington, MI), responds, "Public relations lacks a figurehead -- or any person or group for that matter -- leading us toward a defined national strategy... Societies such as PRSA continue to operate within an old governance & chapter model while using mostly 1-way communication to overcommunicated members who are strapped for time... Perhaps it's time to do fundamental soul searching & new direction setting at the society level. (That is not to say there aren't long-range strategic plans. But member involvement & buy-in on such documents is typically so limited that they are irrelevant to the individual member.) If we are, in fact, in the business of building mutually beneficial relationships, then our societies are letting the challenge & opportunity slip away by not acting soon to redefine who & what we will be in the next century."
- **"Are there too many, with too much the same agenda?"** asks John Budd, The Omega Group (NYC), who also offers thoughts on the role & relevance of pr societies: "In this time of cost cutting, how many meetings off-site can be underwritten? Many have great, stimulating speakers but there's little if any echo. Should there be? PR folks are rarely accused of introspection or intellectual thought, yet many of these programs belie that. But little credit is accorded. Should this be addressed ... it validates many of these meetings. Do we need more, or fewer such groups? Why two research bodies -- Institute & Foundation? (Arthur Page Society gets into research, too.) Questions, questions, questions."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

RETIRES. Two professional leaders left longtime positions December 31.

Hal Warner (sr principal, Manning, Selvage & Lee, DC) for whom the Warner Ethics Series (see pr 1/6) is named, was '91 PRSA pres, Gold Anvil winner last year. Perhaps best known for pioneering work in product re-

calls, consumer relations strategy.

Chuck Sengstock (dir corp com'ns - N. Amer, Motorola) is the expert on applying Quality Improvement measures to pr. His first retirement task is to finish a book on the subject. Both will consult but not at killer pace.

HUMOR: ESSENTIAL, OVERLOOKED PART OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Humor specialist Rick Segel (Segel & Assocs, Burlington, Mass) gives this example: A waiter builds a rapport with you, the customer, thru laughs & stories. Tho the food is below par & service is just okay, his or her likelihood of receiving a 20% or better tip is higher than if he or she had served perfectly & the food was excellent -- but the waiter had no personal-ality. And the likelihood of your going back is much higher because of the personal contact. "It's a tool for doing more business," he told prr.

"How many stores don't you frequent because you don't like the people there? Why don't you like them? Usually because they don't smile. What's a smile? A pregnant laugh."

THE FUN FACTOR

The greatest lesson comes from the "most unfunny people in our society -- the techies, the nerds we made fun of in school. Now they're laughing at us." He points to the computer industry -- experiencing the "fastest & biggest growth in the country" -- with all its cute icons & fun things. "They use the term user-friendly, which is synonymous with fun. The entire computer industry is based on the fun factor."

Are the people in your org'n user-friendly? With customers? How do you get there? "Using fun & humor." Southwest Airlines encourages flight attendants & pilots to joke & tease. People actually pay attention to their pre-flight emergency instructions because they are funny, attests Segel.

"Humor is a critical aspect of creating 1-on-1 relationships because it bonds people. And in the end, it creates business."

WHAT DOES HUMOR DO?

- 1) It makes you like the people using the humor. You laugh with them
- 2) which creates bonding.
- 3) Bonding makes people more forgiving so standards don't have to be so high. Quality is important, but if customers like you they will forgive lesser quality. Those most qualified don't always get the job, he notes.

4) Humor also defuses tension. The greater the tension, the less humor it takes to get people laughing. Sometimes one word will do it: like a pin popping a balloon, the right word releases the tension. At a Central Mass PRSA awards program, there was tension because one org'n won many of the awards, leaving a number of disgruntled non-winners. At the end of the ceremony, Segel burst from the back of the room & using an Italian accent he put into words, humorously, what many were thinking. "I said I felt the whole thing was a rip off & I dumped on all the award winners" getting



people to laugh while doing it. "It's an interesting way of addressing a problem, making light of it."

Frequently he is called in by companies to communicate bad news. For example, he was asked to speak to store managers at a mall in Appleton, Wisc, to inform them they had to be open Saturday nights. "First I get them laughing, then I pass on the bad news."

HOW TO USE IT

Good humor is "saying what people are already thinking about." But there are some constraints, he advises:

1. **Focus on the situation**, not on the person. It's the action that's funny, not the person.
2. If you choose to use humor that is about people, make sure it's about **yourself**. You can only joke about the things you have ownership of.
3. **Use good taste**. Don't focus on ethnic, religious or sensitive issues.
4. **Test the waters**.
5. **Know the boundaries**.
6. **Know what makes your listener(s) laugh**.

USING HUMOR DOESN'T MEAN JUST 1-LINERS OR JOKES

It's an attitude, a desire to connect with others & have fun doing it. To acknowledge the obvious, to address tense situations with sensitivity & lightness. "Laughter puts things in perspective. I tell people, be conscious & do this. I do it because this is how I live my life," explains Segel. Then he quips, sounding like Dom DeLuise, "I really wanted to be born a sex symbol, but hey, I'm not. I wanted to look like Mel Gibson. If I have one more woman say 'Oh, you're such a teddy bear I want to hug you'.... I don't want to be hugged. I want to be a tiger. I am not. God did not make me that way. I rejected that for a long time. But I'm getting close to 50 ... I accept it."

LOSS OF ONE MEDIA - CRITICISM SOURCE RAISES CALL FOR ANOTHER

The quarterly mag *Forbes MediaCritic* ceased publication with the Fall '96 issue. Lack of a corporate sponsor is the reason given. Concurrently, calls for revising the National News Council are heard.

MediaCritic will return in an on-line form, a spokesperson in editor Terry Eastland's office told pr. He will write a weekly article (each Wednesday) on-line, to which readers can respond. (pr will let you know)

Regarding MediaCritic, "someone else may take it. However, there's no word now about anything happening. It would be great tho, because it's needed," the spokesperson added. With the public's eroding trust of the media, the mag provided a necessary balance for journalists. Every healthy profession needs its critics.

Even among media pros there is erosion of confidence. Columnist Jack Germond, McLaughlin Group veteran, on being told the program now could be seen around the world as NBC expands into foreign markets, responded: "Good. Now we can take credit for dumbing down the world." (PAC's *Impact*, Dec '96) Germond has since left the McLaughlin Group.

MINNESOTA PRESS COUNCIL CASE STIRS CALLS FOR ACTION

When WCCO-TV was censured by this body and won an Emmy the same day (pr 11/11/96), Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes & others suggested reviving the National News Council -- a body like Minnesota's with no legal force, but suasion in the court of public opinion.

Then, last week, columnist William Rusher picked up the theme from the conservative side. In our society, only from bad media treatment is there no recourse. "There is an issue of elementary justice here, which I hope the media are at last ready to recognize." Ex-NYTimes ed Abe Rosenthal & 60 Minutes head Don Hewitt killed the previous Council, which worked from '73-'83. (Copy of Rusher's column from pr)

DOES THE NET THREATEN TRADITIONAL MEDIA? STUDIES SAY NO

"Americans are gravitating to on-line services & the Internet in record numbers, but not for fun & games. Information, com'n & research are the forces luring consumers to cyberspace," claims a release from Market Facts.

In its recent survey, 82% of respondents say they go on-line primarily to gather news & info; 81% to use e-mail; 69% to conduct research. The activities getting the most time include: e-mail & research (both cited by 28%) & gathering news & info (19%).

PEW STUDY CONFIRMS FINDING

Those who use computers to get news do not give up newspapers, tv or radio news, finds Pew Research Ctr. 55% of those using on-line services for news also said they read a newspaper "yesterday" (the classic media-use question). This is higher than the 50% recorded for the general public.

TV: 61% watched tv news yesterday -- vs 59% of public at large.
Radio: 52% vs 44%.

Relevant additional data: 75% of adult on-line users also use the Web, up from only 21% a year ago!

OPINIONS ON NEW MEDIA

Some highlights from a conference on the new media, sponsored by West Glen Communications & the New Media Forum:

- It offers "a high degree of **one-to-one marketing & personalization**," notes Seth Radwell of Prodigy. As an example, he cites Prodigy users' ability to register for the news topics they're interested in & "intelligence agents" link them to such info continually as well as bring up info based on the user's on-line habits.
- "Readers like the variety of the Web, but what I think they like even more is the **feeling of empowerment -- the sense of independent control that's lacking in other media**," explains Sam Meddis of USA Today Online which reaches 400,000 daily. He advocates giving users links to the other info -- "anything that makes the reader's understanding of the story better."