

COMIC RELIEF GETS MESSAGE ACROSS ON BUSINESS CARD

Gary Slack, mng dir of Slack Barshinger & Partners -- the firm that assisted Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (see lead) -- wants people to know he is reachable. In 7 lines of print across the top of his business card he lists the ways:

Slack Barshinger & Partners, Inc * 444 N. Michigan Ave, Suite 900
Chicago, IL 60611 * Phone 312-527-5243 or 5244 * Fax 312-527-5661
Modem 312-923-7610 * Cellular 708-771-9429 * Wife's Cellular 847-977-4521
Home 847-446-9005 * Home Fax 847-446-9012
CompuServe ID# 71165,2435 * America Online ID# GARYS97398
E-mail garys@slackcom.com
Mother-in-Law 908-233-1821

"It's an incredible conversation starter," Slack told pr. How it came about: "I've always put all my phone numbers on my card as a personal statement about how ridiculous things are with all the numbers we have these days.

"At one point along the way I thought, 'maybe some people think I'm a big nerd with all these numbers,' so I needed a punch line to show this really is more of a statement than just some guy caught up in his own self importance. Now, when I put it in front of people at meetings, 5 minutes into the meeting I hear them cracking up because they got thru the card." That *is* his mother-in-law's number. She's only had 1 call so far.

ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶"Failing to meet an ever changing & sometimes whimsical definition by the public of what a good corporate citizen is may be the biggest hazard." So said pr pioneer & visionary Arthur Page. Ed Block, PRSA's '97 Gold Anvil honoree, calls the letter in which this sentence appears "a public relations primer in exactly 379 words." (Copy of Block's presentation on Page & his revered pr principles from Arthur W. Page Society, 212/387-4259)

¶New newsletter -- *Web Content Report* -- reviews Web sites. Uses a 1-pg report card grading strategy, content, personality, navigability & intelligent use of the medium, answers a Question of the Month by interviewing Webmasters. (Ragan Communications, 312/335-0037; www.ragan.com)

¶Upsizing replaces downsizing, reports American Mgmt Ass'n. For the 12 months ending in June, US companies created twice as many jobs as they cut. Not that eliminating positions isn't occurring -- 41% of companies did it. Rather, these are strategic or restructuring cuts. Only 19% of companies reported a general downsizing -- still a lot, but in '96 it was 28%, and 43% in '91.

¶Critique of Disney's pr blasts company for not stating its position on various attacks from interest groups (PRSA's *Strategist*, Fall issue). "Their policy is to discuss things they think will further their business interests, which means they only discuss what they want to discuss." Seems like a very sound approach to pr. Other aspects of Disney pr are questionable, however -- as the article shows. But writer's view of "I'm the media, they have to talk me" is antediluvian.

WHEN FREEDOM OF THE PRESS FAILS, GO AROUND THE MEDIA

Going around the media became the focus when 3 Chicago newspapers refused to run an ad by Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK). Ad challenged the Leo Burnett ad agency to quit the Phillip Morris account. It was intended to run the day of a much-anticipated Burnett companywide meeting to chart the agency's future after a string of account losses.

Tribune initially accepted the ad but later rescinded, saying in a fax that the ad "does not meet our principles for advertising acceptability." Rejected ad pointed out that "Thanks to decades of Burnett's Marlboro advertising, 60% of all American kids who smoke choose Marlboro."

"It's a shame that after decades of tobacco advertising, the *Chicago Tribune* couldn't see its way to publish an ad for a competing idea: tobacco-free kids," CTFK pres Bill Novelli wrote the *Trib*'s publisher.

TO GO AROUND THE MEDIA, CTFK...

1. Mobilized volunteers to hand out leaflets to Leo Burnett employees as they went to Chicago Theater for their much publicized meeting. Leaflets contained the rejected ad & a letter from Novelli.
2. Mailed leaflets to more than 200 Burnett mgmt-level employees & ...
3. ... to *Chicago Tribune*'s publisher & 160 editorial employees.
4. Posted the ad, news release & 2 letters on the Web & e-mailed them to dozens of anti-tobacco Web sites & Internet news groups globally.

"Fortunately, the public today has the Internet, & anyone interested in viewing the ad that the *Chicago Tribune* didn't want them to see can do so quite easily," comments Novelli. (See related views in pr 10/27 & 10/13)

INITIAL RESULTS

- 800+ leaflets handed out to Leo Burnett employees, with significant pass-along readership.
- Print coverage in *Ad Age*, *Crain's Chicago Business*, & *Chicago Reader*.
- Live news segment on WMAQ-AM radio while leafleting was underway.
- On-line coverage.
- 417 documented viewings of the ad on the Web, including 74 ad viewings by Leo Burnett employees via the leonet.leoburnett network.



LEO BURNETT AGENCY'S RESPONSE STATEMENT

Called itself a "passionate defender of the freedom of commercial speech. However, we believe the media...have a responsibility to be fair & accurate. The ad...was neither fair nor accurate. The decisions by the newspapers not to run this ad were made independent of us, & we applaud them." When asked what was unfair or inaccurate, agency replied, "We are not going to elaborate further. It's just engaging in a debate."

Writes the *Chicago Reader*, "The CTFK has made its mischief & attracted the spotlight. Moreover, it has won the argument. It supports its case with numbers & research, while the *Tribune* & Leo Burnett cite credos that they haven't shown apply. It might be unthinkable for the *Tribune* to publish an ad provoking a huge ad agency that brings it bread & butter. It wouldn't be unscrupulous."

STRATEGIC PR OPPORTUNITY: KEEPING ORGANIZATIONS FOCUSED

"The pursuit of growth for its own sake is a serious strategic error. It's why so many American corporations have become unfocused," writes adv'g exec Al Ries in his book, *Focus: The Future of Your Company Depends On It*.

Becoming unfocused occurs naturally. In the physical world it's called *entropy*. Take a look at your closet, garage, desk or that kitchen drawer. Do they stay in order? Not unless you're focused on keeping it that way. Once focus is lost, he says, "things start to go wrong. What seemed like a world of opportunity turns into a world of problems. Objectives unmet. Sales flattening. Profits declining. The press unflattering."

Examples of entropy: GM, Sears, IBM. "If history repeats itself, as it generally does, Microsoft is the next IBM, the next company to become unfocused."

TWO REASONS FOR THIS UNFOCUSING:

1. **Diversification** -- "company after company searches for the magic acquisition that will drive sales & stock prices skyward. But in the end they usually find only disappointment & disillusionment." Examples: IBM bought Rolm in '84, sold it in '89; Chrysler bought Golfstream Aerospace in '85, sold it in '90; Coca-Cola bought Columbia Pictures in '82, sold it in '89.
2. **Line extension** -- eg, Listerine mouthwash & Listerine toothpaste; Bic lighters & Bic panty hose; Adidas running shoes & Adidas cologne. "Imagine a medical practice saying: 'We are known as terrific brain surgeons, so let's get into the heart, liver, lung & limb business.' In other words, they turn themselves into general surgeons. It never happens in medicine. It does happen in management.... Putting everything under one roof is a dangerous practice. It's the management theory that leads directly to the line-extension trap. For many companies line extension is the easy way out. It's perceived as the inexpensive, logical way to grow. Only when it's too late does a company turn around & notice that they have become unfocused, perhaps precariously so."

SOME KEYS TO BEING FOCUSED

1. **Use a simple idea**, expressed with simple words that are immediately understandable by your customers, employees & the media.
2. **Make it memorable**. "If your customers can't remember what you stand for, what good does it do to take that stand?"
3. **Repetition = Power**. "The more often a word or concept is repeated, the more powerful it becomes. By establishing a focus for your organization, you create an environment in which the focus gets repeated over & over again. In the process, the focus increases its power."
4. **Be revolutionary**. Focusing "goes against the grain of conventional thinking.... (It) restricts growth outside a selected area, much like pruning a plant forces it to grow only in a specific direction. If you want to focus a corporation, you have to be prepared to break a few Generally Accepted Mgmt Practices" -- ie, the demand for growth.
5. **An enemy is needed**. To be truly successful, others must fail. "A focused company always knows who the enemy is & what they are doing. It can develop specific plans to deal with the enemy. If necessary it can rapidly mount counterattacks." (E.g. Coke vs. Pepsi)
6. **Find the specific future for your organization** -- predict "where the future lies & then take specific steps to make that future happen."
7. **Apply it internally as well as externally**. "When you have a focus, you know what people to hire, research to conduct, products to introduce."
8. **Your product is not the focus**. Instead, you "decide which aspect of the market to focus on. Then support that decision with pricing, packaging & distribution that reinforces that focus. If you're not willing to walk away from a segment of your business, you don't have a focus."
9. **"The attempt to appeal to everybody is the biggest single mistake** a business can make. Better to stake out your own ground & write off everyone else.... When you attempt to have a broad focus, you wind up with a small share of the market."
10. **"A powerful focus is almost never effective in the short term....** You need to have the courage to make a focusing decision & then wait for the market to react to your move. It won't happen overnight." (HarperBusiness, NYC, \$14; 304 pgs)

BELIEVES AD AGENCIES SHOULD SPIN OFF PR FIRMS

"The promised synergies between pr & adv'g agencies have never developed. The pr units operate separately & have a separate list of clients. They would do better on their own. Furthermore, pr & adv'g are natural competitors. When both are housed in the same company, they sometimes resolve their conflicts internally & thus deprive their clients of objective advice."