

## VOLUNTEERISM IS GLOBAL, A BASIC PR STRATEGY

Among the 6 recipients of the Points of Light Fdn's '97 Awards for Excellence in Corporate Community Service are 2 international corporations:

1. AXA & its US partner, The Equitable Companies, started their volunteer program in '91 at hq in France, soon had 2,000 employees involved. Today, there are 7,000 AXA volunteers thruout the world, France, US, Belgium, Germany, Canada, Spain, UK, Luxembourg, Australia, Hong Kong & Japan.
2. Chase Manhattan has teams of employee & retiree volunteers in 90 US cities & 35 countries. In '97, the Chase Global Day of Service saw 9,000 volunteers participating in over 300 community service projects around the world.

Other 4 recipients are: 3) AT&T Wireless Services; 4) Gap Inc; 5) UGI Utilities; & 6) Unitrode Corp.

### THE KEY QUESTION

Are these programs strategic, focused philanthropy -- putting company people in a position to rub elbows & build relationships with opinion leaders in important constituencies? Or are they feel good activities to "get our name out there"? The latter are far less valuable than the former.

### ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS:

¶ **For global communications**, Benn's Media 1998 contains over 44,000 entries & contains listings on all media activities, including newspapers, periodicals & broadcasting in 221 countries. New edition also lists electronic media & contains e-mail numbers & Internet addresses. Directory is split into 3 volumes covering the UK, Europe & the World. Listings provide 55,000 editorial & adv'g contacts, ad rates & details of readership, circulation & frequency. Within the UK directory is an A-Z of publishing houses & subsidiaries with a list of the pub'ns they produce. Relevant org'ns such as trade ass'ns are also listed along with media services ranging from marketing to translation. World volume is divided by continents & then split by country for easy referencing. Both the European & World volumes are divided by subject classification for each country. Volumes can be purchased individually or in any multiple combination. (From Miller Freeman Information Services; <http://www.mfplc.com/mfinfo/>)

¶ **General Guide for the Release of Information on the Condition of Patients** has been newly revised. Resource addresses hospitals' & healthcare facilities' critical responsibility to protect the privacy & confidentiality of patients & patient info. This pocket reference is helpful to anyone who interacts with the media on patient-related issues. Except for the following 1-word conditions, no info about the patient's condition should be released without the patient's permission: undetermined; good; fair; serious; critical. "Stable" should not be used as a condition. (Available from Society for Healthcare Strategy & Market Development of the AHA at 800/AHA-2626)

## IS A NATIONAL PR CAMPAIGN OR PROGRAM POSSIBLE TODAY ?

With relationships, customer delight & similar person-to-person activities the ultimate techniques now -- not just information transfer -- how do you craft a program for a whole country, unless it's Andorra or Luxembourg?

Does this imply that pr must move out into "the provinces," whatever they may be for your organization? Consider the emerging model:

- Business is decentralized with operations & decisionmaking bucked downward
- Education is moving to school-based mgmt, away from rule by central office
- Reinventing gov't means the devolution of responsibility from federal to state/province or even local venues

### DEJU VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Until fairly recently, localized pr was the norm. GM had regional and even state pr offices. The Bell System had customer service & pr operations in every town. Now staffs are smaller & all at hq. Local offices are shuttered. Is this why telecommunications has so many pr issues?

### WHAT'S DRIVING THE CHANGE ?

A. First is recognition of the tenet that "all issues are local."

E.g. "the economy" means investment return in the Northeast, saving mfg jobs in the Midwest, fueling more growth in the Southeast, regaining its position as the world's 7th largest economy in Calif.

B. **Language is another factor.** Words take on different meanings in different locales. Phrases are daily argot in some places that simply would have no meaning elsewhere. Running even an info campaign from NYC (or any central location) has a huge risk of falling into the chauvinistic or xenophobic belief that everyone talks & thinks the way we do "here."

C. **Emerging basic strategy cements the move.** A 5-point methodology is at work:

1. **Go Direct.** Avoid the 3 vicious gatekeepers that would mold your message & intent to their purposes -- the media, politicians, special interests -- by directly communicating with & building relationships with stakeholders. Why do you need an interpreter or mediator to talk to your audiences?



- 2. **To Key Stakeholders.** Supertarget the stakeholders that can give, or withhold, needed support & behaviors now, because constant change & tight budgets make anything else potentially superfluous. This will vary geographically.
- 3. **Via Opinion Leaders.** They guide group decisions & behavior, so identify 'em & build relationships thru participative pr activities. They are local heroes.
- 4. **Using the Organizational Family.** Employees, their families, retirees, vendors, key customers become the communicators & relationship builders thru ambassador, constituency relations, customer satisfaction, volunteer programs.
- 5. **On a Local Scale.** That's where people interact with people. Think globally with One Clear Voice themes & uniform standards -- but act locally.

**HOW TO GET THERE**

Does this mean larger staffs spread around the territory? In some cases, perhaps. Maybe it only means practitioners quickening the pace toward a new role as strategists, counselors & trainers -- delegating communicating & relationship-building to managers, employees & others in the local worlds they live in.

**MUCH MARKETING WIDSOM IS IN FACT IGNORANCE & STEREOTYPING**

Consumer behavior researcher Britt Beemer has updated his book *Predatory Marketing* (pr 1/27/97 & 2/3/97) with 10 new surveys. Book stresses the need to really understand what drives your customers; & to hear what they tell you without being defensive. Beemer illustrates his findings with stories of successes & failures.

**A. Loyalty factor surprises.** National survey of 1,002 adults asked consumers to rate products they are very loyal to. Following are the 11 highest-rated products for which consumers have brand loyalty:

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Soft drinks (33.9%)          | 7. Coffee (28.9%)                                  |
| 2. Insurance (32.6%)            | 8. Mayonnaise (28.1%)                              |
| 3. Hair products (30.6%)        | 9. Laundry products (26.4%)                        |
| 4. Bath soap (30.9%)            | 10. Over-the-counter meds & pain relievers (26.4%) |
| 5. Health & beauty aids (29.9%) | 11. Toilet paper (26%)                             |
| 6. Cars & trucks (29%)          |  |

**B. Psychology of Loyalty.** The surprise was #2, insurance. Beemer concludes: a) Clients are loyal to their agent who gives them *personal service*; b) When people are canceled by auto insurers & then obtain coverage elsewhere, they feel loyalty to stay with the new company that was willing to assume the risk of insuring them (as long as the premium is considered fair).

**C. Teens Are Misread By Adults.** When asked what influences the buying decisions of 13-19 yr olds, respondents said: a) give-aways offering such things as CDs or posters of popular bands (50.1%); b) name brands (49.2%); c) use of popular musical groups that appeal to teens (37.6%); d) use of upbeat lyrics in a commercial's music (34.8%); e) promos offering reduced prices (32.4%).

**D. What Teens Actually Do.** Beemer learned teens: a) listen to radio a lot but do little newspaper reading (see also pr 2/2); b) 34% think tv ads designed for teens are "corny"; c) 53% do not believe the young actors who appear in the commercials reflect them. Adults who are writing these messages are "missing the boat" because they are using stereotypes to characterize teens.

(*Predatory Marketing*, \$14, Broadway Books, 1540 Broadway, NYC 10036; 212/782-8941)

**UNCERTAINTY OVER "HEALTHCARE" SIGNALS TODAY'S LINGUISTIC TRAPS**

The struggle over our flexible, living language continues. Lehman Millet Inc -- a healthcare communications firm -- recently had an internal battle over the word "healthcare." Or is it "health care"? Notes Susan Schumacher, svp mktg comms:

*"While it was surprising to us that a passionate debate over such a commonly used word in our industry could rage on for days, there were good reasons. Not the least of these is the fact that neither healthcare nor health care can be found in the dictionary, which should be shocking, even to those who don't work for a firm specializing in the 'h' segment. It's not, after all, an uncommon or underutilized word(s)!"*

**DECISION: NO DECISION**

What did LMI finally decide? **"It doesn't really matter, because in English, nothing grammatical is ever permanent.** The English language, still alive & kicking because of its ability to adopt & adapt, is running afoul of its own eclecticism. The force that makes it so vital is the same force that is making it more & more chaotic. There is no one central authority to settle usage & grammar disputes among the English-speaking nations of the world," writes Judith Gimple, LMI's editor.

**Why do we waste time caring about this stuff?** "Because we care about language. Words are our tools. Without them we would not be able to argue our points & persuade people that our client's products are worthwhile, even great. Without words, ads, brochures, flyers & such would be just so much artistic design. It's the words that provide the punch, & so the words & how they are used deserve our time."