

Issues & crises, with as a rule several positions being taken by disparate actors in the matter, offer the same realm of innumerable variables. Under no circumstances can practitioners have research guidance on them all.

Professionals have *something* -- theoretical research, current data, case studies, whatever -- that licenses them to proceed knowing chances are good they will at least "do no harm." But if you don't know the theory, or the case literature...

ORGANIZATION ATTEMPTS TO "BE PERSONAL" -- DOES IT SUCCEED ?

"Because this hotel is a human institution to serve people, and not solely a money-making organization, we hope you will be granted peace & rest while you are under our roof." So reads a pillow-flyer titled "To Our Guests" at the Phoenix Airport Hilton. (Copy from pr)

- "May this room & hotel be your 'second home,'" the copy continues
- 4 rather emotional, quite personal paragraphs wish the guest success in the business that required the trip, thoughts of loved ones far away & similar

Reading the flyer is probably a pleasant experience for most. But does this tactic work?

- Do people feel differently about this hotel than others that don't make this effort to reach out?
- Is this part of attaining customer delight?
- Is the staff, one & all, sufficiently trained that putting out such a message is safe & not likely to be refuted by some harsh-talking clerk or cleaner?
- Is use of the message a way to create awareness for staff of their responsibilities for satisfying customers?

ITEM OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **CEO wisdom worth reciting in strategy sessions.** Proctor & Gamble's John Pepper told an interviewer last week: *"In community service it would be inconceivable to try to devise a plan without hearing from all sides. Why should business be any different?"*

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

DIED. Dick Charlton, vp-cc, Parker Hannifin (Cleveland), ex-IABC chmn, also PRSA & NIRI leader. Took a leading role in the PRSA-IABC merger talks. Perhaps the only practitioner to achieve fellow status in both IABC & PRSA.

Steve Kaye, counselor who formerly headed pr at several major corp'ns including Searle & Int'l Paper. Was chmn of both PRSeminar & Institute for PR Research & Education. Latter has set up a scholarship in his honor.

ITEMS TO CONSIDER IN CREATING A "SURGICAL" MEDIA STRATEGY

With the possible exception of simple product promo/service reminder efforts, getting your product's or organization's "name in the paper" for visibility purposes is today nonsensical. Unless yours is a virtually unknown entity & the goal is simply to become known -- the old "just spell my name right" strategy.

Same is true of promo events, where sponsors get their name attached, are allowed to hang a banner or appear in the program. **There's no evidence either type of visibility motivates behavior or influences attitudes.** The assumption must be that people say, "X Co. sponsored the concert, therefore it must be a good outfit & I will seek it out to do business." **Really?!**

WHY A DIFFERENT APPROACH IS REQUIRED

- A. News media are changing** -- not just in loss of credibility & reach, but in tone of coverage
- Even in basic product news -- the type of publicity most often sought by marketers -- the "news" angle too often now is fear-mongering (if you raise your head above the bushes & call attention to your product). "If you eat that or use this or do such-&-such, there may be hidden germs, carcinogens or radioactivity lurking to get you." Check any medium & see the evidence
- B. Media-use patterns are changing**, e.g. despite the hype, it's newspapers not tv that deliver the news (pr 9/11/95); NPR is where you reach opinion leaders; the under-35 crowd are notorious anti-consumers of news in any form
- C. PR is being measured differently.** Wise management expects behavior change or motivation, not more information dumped on unwilling publics

WHY THEN DO WE STILL BOMB MEDIA WITH PRESS RELEASES?

Any decent medium has to rewrite anyway, so fact sheets are better. This is why a practitioner needn't have journalism training to work with media. The idea a pr person is ever going to write the article is ludicrous. One needs to be able to persuade them it's news & explain the details strategically -- not write the article or film the item for them.

Making news not news releases is better still. Yet telephone boiler rooms for placements are still common.



What is known in today's contentious times is that visibility turns some folks off & others on. Unless you have a pretty good indication of what the head count will be -- e.g. more for you than against -- **it's a gamble.**

WHY GAMBLE WHEN SURGICAL PRECISION IS POSSIBLE?

"Surgical" means precisely what the term implies: placements in exactly the right media for your purpose.

- It requires knowing **which media your target stakeholders actually read, watch or hear.** Assumptions are dangerous, so intelligence work is needed
- In issue cases or legislative support, it may mean **targeting a single key person** & placing a story in the medium he reads -- or has clipped for him
- A single such placement is **worth a folder of untargeted clips**

Example: You're working on a regulatory matter & Sen. Jones from Louisiana is key. Don't expect him to see, be shown or believe what the WashPost or NYTimes write. Place something in the New Orleans Times-Pic, however, and you can rest assured his staff will clip it for him -- because it was also seen by his *constituents*. Give the story a local angle, or a local person, and that's good surgical media use.

1. **Deal with key reporters as you do with analysts,** customers, elected officials -- face-to-face. Build lasting relationships that serve the journalists.
 - As a senior writer said in pr 3/21/94: "Call, make personal contact" to place stories -- and never use computer address labels on anything, since it signals that "10,000 other reporters are on the same mailing list."
2. **Don't let pr firms own these relationships.** They may well have access to the journalists you need. That's an advantage they offer. But make them introduce you so you can create a relationship, not be beholden to your firm to work with this person.
 - Also don't just tell your firm you "want ink," but target their efforts specifically & surgically
 - Perhaps ask them to work the less likely media, but keep key media for staff work -- so you own those relationships
 - Or target their market-support efforts on audiences for which there is no ad budget, achieving truly integrated communications

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS A SURGICAL STRATEGY MUST ANSWER

1. How use media to **target opinion leaders** -- and exactly which media?
2. How apply **the 20/80 rule** -- to reach the 20% of stakeholders that give you 80% of your business, issue support, admissions, votes or whatever?

3. How **encourage feedback** so can stimulate face-to-face, i.e., whose latent readiness to act on the subject is strong enough to want to step forward?

VIRTUAL BRANDING RAISES GOOD QUESTIONS ABOUT ALL BRANDING

Virtual branding is online -- where there are few visual clues. "If I'm walking down a street and spot a large bookstore, I don't even need to notice the name to have a pretty good idea of what the experience will be like. But online, all Web sites look pretty much the same," points out Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, the Internet bookstore.

His comments -- in a full page house promo in the WSJ -- apply to anyone trying to establish or maintain a brand (or reputation, for that matter):

1. **What is a brand?** "A *relationship* (sic) between you & your customer"
 - "Ultimately what's important is not what you send out to them in advertising etc, but what they reflect back & how you respond to that."
 - **Word-of-mouth** therefore defines a brand's value: "Ultimately, that's what a brand is, the things people say about you when you're not there."
2. **The promise.** "A brand has to make a promise, and then deliver it."
 - A basic pr responsibility is enunciating the promise -- and precious few brands do so.
 - How many brands -- of anything -- can you think of where you know the promise?
3. **Branding as a time saver.** "Brands mean all kinds of things to people, but underlying all of them is the idea of saving time, and in the late 20th century, time is the most precious commodity by far."
 - Brands save the time of checking out all the entries in a category.
 - They "eliminate the risk of a bad experience..."
 - ...which could cost you a colossal amount of time."

CRISIS PR IS A LOT LIKE PRACTICING MEDICINE

Doctors don't know, can't know all the myriad variables involved in each patient's case. But they have to heal -- and 98% of the time they do. Or time does.

What's their secret? The Hippocratic Oath says, "Do no harm," i.e., whatever you do on the case, be sure it won't make things worse. In other words, have some evidence what you do will help.