

# pr reporter

The Cutting-Edge Newsletter of Public Relations,  
Public Affairs & Communication Strategies

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## RESEARCH A FIXTURE ON THE LOCAL LEVEL; SCHOOLS ARE LEADERS

Locally, everyone's doing it: hospitals, museums, retail stores, arts organizations, activist groups, schools. "It" is research to uncover consumers' & stakeholders' thoughts, wants & needs, and likely behaviors.

### ONE SECTOR'S EXPERIENCE SHOWS THE TREND

Faced with competition from home schooling,

private & parochial schools & other alternative education ventures, many public schools are role models for using research.

"There's more competition & a lot more interest in education now," says Rich Bagin of Nat'l School PR Assn. "Enlightened school leaders are asking, 'How we can improve ourselves?'" Some of what's happening:

- Many school systems, especially larger ones, have had some form of data collection in place for 5+ years. But **the methods are more complex now**
- Mail surveys are still used but phone surveys, public opinion forums, focus groups, opinion leader studies & classroom surveys have joined them
- Smaller districts may choose to create the research themselves; **larger districts now have research dep'ts**
- Some combine internal & external research capabilities. **Research companies are being used.** "School districts need data to make decisions, not anecdotal information," says Carol Malach of research house Gordon S. Black (Rochester, NY). "Schools understand they have to reach out to stakeholders in their communities, not just one group."

### HOW SURVEYS ARE HELPING

1. **Evaluate staff, school conditions, technology, helpfulness/courtesy of staff, etc.** Some districts use findings as part of teachers/administrators/principals' performance evaluation. For others it's a guide. "Using it as a sole basis for evaluation would be inappropriate," says Ed Sloat, research dir, Peoria Unified Schl Dist (Glendale, Az). "Our parent surveys serve only as info for supervisors & principals because the information doesn't necessarily reflect the majority of parental attitudes."
2. **Identify parental concerns & community issues.** "We can address concerns like school safety & effectively target com'ns to let people know what our record is," says dpr Jim Cummings, Phoenix Union HS Dist (Az).



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3. **Measure parent/student/staff satisfaction.** "The reason we do surveys is the same reason most major businesses are interested in continuous improvement & benchmarking," says Brian Porter, dir, Dep't of Information, Montgomery County Public Schools (Md). "We want a sense of customer satisfaction & consumer knowledge about the business we're in. Feedback is important to identify problems & areas where success should be continued."
4. **Policy development.** "We're in a very sophisticated community that demands a role in school policy development," says Porter. "We give parents a lot of say & authority on how to guide major policy decisions. *Woe to us to march off blindly without paying attention.*"
5. **School programs.** When Montgomery County opened preferred choice high schools, students could choose which school to attend. To avoid busing alignments, the district surveyed students & parents about which schools they would choose & the types of programs they wanted. "We made our decisions based on how the schools were configured & the signature programs offered at those schools," says Porter.
6. **Staff training & development.** Montgomery County has held focus groups of teachers, support staff & administrators to create staff training & development policies. The district also conducted a com'ty & staff characteristic survey while hiring a new principal. Parents were invited to a meeting to identify the chief characteristics for the new administrator. Applicants were screened based on the characteristics cited.
7. **Student assessment.** Montgomery County annually assesses graduating seniors' perceptions about quality of their education and college & career plans. Survey is administered in classrooms. Info is used by school counselors & parents to advise students on college choices. Schools use results for program monitoring & planning.

#### WHAT DOESN'T WORK

- **Surveying audiences & not using the data.**  
Conducting research is a public matter.

When an audience is told that action is being taken & participation is important, they must know why their input is important & how the info will be used.

- **Getting buy-in from staff & administrators after survey is completed.**  
"We encourage districts to have committees in place to help with the process," says Carol Malach. "Districts should have site-based teams that, hopefully, include staff from all levels of the administration so employees feel they have a say in the process."

Montgomery County's research dep't works with a committee that includes 3 school board members. Director of research sits on district policy teams to insure that findings get implemented in strategic plans.

(More from Sloat at 602/468-6077; Malach, 716/272-8400, x512; Cummings, 602/271-3135; Porter, 301/279-3391)

**ONE EXCELLENT METHOD: SOLICIT THOUGHTS OF OPINION LEADERS**

Montgomery County Public Schools has a list of 1,000 com'ty groups & opinion leaders. To solicit feedback on school policy issues under consideration, Porter mails out a request for comment on an issue & asks for feedback. He reports *response rates are very high.*

**HERZBERG'S CLASSIC EMPLOYEE MOTIVATORS QUESTIONED IN STUDY**

The most important motivators for employees are constructive feedback from supervisors & cash incentives, claims a survey for American Express. This constitutes a mixing of hygiene (pay) & motivating (feedback) factors identified over many years in Herzberg's classic research.

**Could current worker cynicism be changing the formula?**

"It's interesting that positive feedback ranks high among employee preferences, over other benefits like on-site daycare or flexible working hours," says Dorothy Crenshaw of Stanton-Crenshaw Com'ns (NY), an Amex pr firm, which commissioned the survey done by David Michaelson & Assoc. (NY). "Praise & cash incentives consistently rank high in employee surveys," she notes.

Highlights of the survey:

- **Nearly half of respondents (46%) name feedback as their preferred form of appreciation.** But 32% prefer financial rewards.
- **Money is the greatest motivator for many workers.** Only 1/3 as many workers feel (1) more interesting work, (2) a more supportive boss or (3) better benefits would be the greatest motivation to do their best work. [If accurate, the first two are a rebuttal of Herzberg]
- **53% say they are more motivated today than they were in '92.**
- **33% say their employers are more appreciative than in the past.**
- **A financial reward is the preferred way (44%) to show appreciation for long-term efforts.** 39% would prefer a trip they could take by themselves or with family. Only 2% prefer merchandise.

1,387 adults were interviewed randomly by telephone -- 733 men & 654 women in full & part-time jobs. Respondents included professional, clerical & secretarial workers, educators, blue-collar workers and sales & service professionals. (More from Crenshaw, 212/780-1900; copy of report from Michaelson, 212/532-3059)

**RESPONSE UNIT PREPARES CLIENTS FOR EURO CONVERSION**

The new Europe is here. Burson-Marsteller created a Euro Rapid Response Unit to prepare clients for European Union's conversion to a common currency. Unit helps clients respond to com'ns issues surrounding the

transition. Clients who call its hotline number receive a fact sheet on Euro transition, a series of Q&As for the media, as well as a com's template. Toll-free number that clients can call (800-759-7243/pin# 2022826) was activated in late December, will be staffed thru January.

The most frequently asked question is: "Will my paycheck be payable?"

Some callers were concerned about the lack of a Euro symbol to use in e-mail & other com's. BM created a stylized E for clients to use until an official design is developed. (More from Philip Murphy, 212/614-5199)

## REALLY GOOD DESIGN COMMUNICATES & IS EASY ON THE EYES

Cards from the Gronstedt Group (Superior, Col) and Natural Resources Defense Council demonstrate good design while effectively communicating to the target audiences.

### 1. SYMBOLIC IMAGES PLUS PERSONALIZATION

Gronstedt's holiday card features an image of geese flying in formation -- a metaphor used in Anders Gronstedt's upcoming book on integrated com's (pr 11/2/98). Inside is the greeting. What's different are the signatures: firm members' last names are *printed* on the card but their first names are *handwritten* above to personalize.

"The card reflects both the personal & professional touch," says Gronstedt's Lisa Siracuse. The geese motif was used to call attention to the theme of Gronstedt's upcoming book.

### 2. USING DESIGN TO SOLVE A COM'S PROBLEM

A recent card from Natural Resources Defense Council shows how graphic psychology gets key messages thru today's info clutter.

- Problem: reporters often don't get NRDC's name correct
- Solution: mail a card to journalists with a bold cover saying, "We've been called every name in the book ... but the name isn't always ours."

Open the card and the copy & logo reinforce: "We're the Natural Resources Defense Council." Card explains types of information NRDC can provide journalists, with of course com's depts' phone number & internet address.

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**HONORS.** Marnie Brennan of ATU Telecommunications named Communicator of the Year by Alaska PRSA.

Horne, formerly vp-pr at Pacific Gas & Electric Co., was honored for his years as a leading practitioner and for being an outstanding contributor to the profession.

Grant Horne inducted into Arthur W. Page Society's Hall of Fame.

