

## PR STILL NOT NAME OF CHOICE FOR CORP DEP'TS, SURVEY FINDS

Sears has gone back to public relations from public affairs -- recognizing, says vp-pr Ron Culp, their role of building relationships.

But pr dep'ts remain com'ns dep'ts in many large companies, according to a survey of 539 U.S. firms over \$1 billion in assets, by Best Practices in Corp Com'ns (DC). Highlights:

- More than half of dept's reviewed go by the title "Com'ns" or "Corporate Com'ns." Many use com'n in the title in various combinations. Ex: "Com'ns & Public Affairs"; "Com'ns & Marketing."
- Media rels is the primary function of 59% of com'ns dep'ts. Corporate com'ns (including all aspects of administration, employee rels, internal/external rels & exec com'ns) was cited second, followed by employee/internal rels & investor rels.

Data was collected via one-on-one interviews & survey forms. (Complete study from Best Practices in Corp Com'ns, 202/463-3766)

## SPEAKING OF NAME CHANGES...HAS MONICA SPOILED "RELATIONS"?

Ramifications of the Lewinsky scandal are reaching deep into Washington's conscience. According to *Fortune*, the small-biz lobby, Nat'l Federation of Independent Business, is changing several dep't names -- removing the words "affairs" and "relations" to avoid any hint of impropriety.

Federal Gov't Relations is now Federal Public Policy. State Gov't Relations is now State Public Policy. And Media Relations is likely to be renamed the Media Dep't.

Will "public relations" and "public affairs" be banished from the vocabulary to avoid embarrassment? (*Fortune*, Feb. 15, p.36)

## WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**NEW TITLES.** PRSA's Sam Waltz gets new title of chair & ceo. COO Ray Gaulke has additional title of pres. By-laws change also allows naming non-elected v.chrm to head key projects, e.g., Ron Sconyers is v.chrm for the K.I.D.S. drug prevention effort. Reflects importance of the officers as spokespersons for PRSA, its projects, the profession.

**ELECTED.** '99 officers for Institute of Public Relations are: Jack Bergen, chrm (Council of PR Firms); Jack Felton, pres & ceo (U/Fla); Ward White, vp/treas (Northwestern Mutual); Lauri Grunig, sec'y (U/Md.)

**DIED.** Sally Dickson, 86, had the first firm owned & operated by women, which became part of Creamer Dickson Basford in '71.

## EXAMPLE OF DRAMATIC CHANGE IN OPINION LEADERSHIP: KIDS, ONCE TOTALLY IGNORED, ARE NOW MAJOR INFLUENCERS

Just a few years ago, any suggestion or comment by youth of any age was likely to be dismissed with "Just a kid; what does she know." Or "When you grow up, son, you'll think differently." This was true even of college students.

How that has changed. The new social contract allows anyone, of almost any age or station, to be an opinion leader (OL). All that's needed is a greater interest in a topic than one's circle, or the time to pursue a subject others can't or aren't. Facilitating this change are:

1. **Intense overcommunication** so that only those focused on a topic can find the time to become informed
2. **Overbusyness** that is reducing the number of subjects-of-interest any person can continue to follow
3. **The trust gap** which makes level of knowledge or expertise on a subject secondary to whether the opinion maker is trusted by his/her following

## IRONIC EXTENSION OF DEMOCRACY

It seems counterintuitive that reliance on the few (OLs) to lead the mass could constitute democracy. It does because there are more & more OLs -- and almost anyone can become one, as explained above.

BUT -- **opinion leadership is subject-by-subject.** There are no more overall OLs. Few are able to attain OL status on more than one topic. This opens the doors for more persons to be OLs than ever -- thus extending the democratic principle of broader, more equitable participation in the marketplace of ideas. Evidence:

- ♦ Anyone remember Bernard Baruch, the all-topics OL of the 40s & 50s? A respected financier, he'd take a brown bag lunch to his bench in Central Park (it has a historic marker on it now) & pontificate on everything. This was grapevined & reported in the media thruout the Roosevelt, Truman & Eisenhower years. Today even the Pope is not followed by a majority of world Catholics. Thus the rise of single-topic OLs.
- ♦ Most of us have been dropping subjects of interest because we can't keep up any longer. But we know others who select these subjects to keep up on. So when we need guidance there, we ask them -- the new breed of OLs. And when they need help on the topics we've stayed abreast of, they call us.
- ♦ **This is the new social contract: shared opinion leadership.**



**CASES OF KIDS AS MAJOR OLS**

1. **Personal computers.** Remember when Apple couldn't sell the first

versions, what they did? Donated 'em to schools, so kids could use them. These kids taught their parents -- and, boom, PCs were everywhere.

◆ To test this, stand in a computer store & see how many kids are leading Dad or Mom in by the hand, then telling them precisely what equipment & software they *must* have. Kids taught us to use PCs.

2. **ATMs.** After their arrival on the scene produced limited response, they were used as teaching tools on the coming hi-tech age in schools. 8-yr old Jimmy then took Grandma to the bank after hours & showed her how easy it was to use this strange new method of banking. Kids led us to ATMs.

3. **In the supermarket.** Sociological researchers find kids have achieved OL status on many purchase decisions. Mom usually chooses the main course, Dad reigns supreme on snacks or dessert -- but stand in the cereal aisle sometime & see who selects what the family eats for breakfast next week.

**IMPACT ON PR STRATEGY**

Effect on programs aimed at schools or direct to kids is both negative & positive.

The old "teach 'em young" strategy is now often unworkable & a waste of effort since by the time youth reach adulthood to buy your product or support your cause, it & the human environment will have changed dramatically. And it's tougher to get material used in schools.

But how about implanting brands? As these "handles" cover the range of products/services offered by branded providers, reaching kids just for this purpose makes sense. **Institutional programs for kids** are an opportunity -- and, if they cover eleemosynary topics, are easier to get used in schools.

◆ As seen in the examples above, **new technologies or ideas** remain a tremendous opportunity. Kids embrace them, schools want to teach them.

**SOME PROGRAMS UNDERWAY**

1. As narrowcasting splinters media, WB tv network targets high schoolers.

Consider programs like "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" & "Dawson's Creek." Advertisers want to sell this market, but expect trendy youth to influence others' purchases. Previously twentysomethings influenced tv fare.

2. Religious org'ns turn to kids to bring parents into the pews as well as to serve youth. Jewish Com'ty Ctr Ass'n initiated a Teen Professional Fellows program & a part-time Teen Professional position on staff.

3. Golin/Harris created a College Campus Panel to advise it on emerging trends on campus. This is a time in people's lives when purchase & other habits are formed. Members come from 50 colleges across US.

**USE KIDS PROGRAMS TO INFLUENCE PARENTS**

Sign in library says it well: "Kids, tell your parents how to use the new automatic card system"

**OBJECT LESSON OR HARBINGER: VENTURA MUSCLES INTO MINN. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE WITH INEXPENSIVE GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN**

Former pro-wrestler Jesse Ventura's celebrity image & tough talk contributed to his stunning win in Minnesota's gubernatorial election. The win was even more surprising since his party -- the Reform Party -- had no money & a loose-knit group of volunteers statewide. Keys to Ventura's success: a) a true grassroots campaign & b) creative use of resources.

"We didn't do gimmicky things," Gerry Drewry of Drewry Com'ns (Hampton, Minn.) told pr. "We were trying to build his image as a potential governor & wanted to get away from the wrestling connection."

Minn. limits campaign spending but provides third-party candidates with a public subsidy if they receive 5% of the vote in the primary. Ventura received 10%, so was able to secure funding for tv & radio ads. In the final tally, Ventura's campaign spent \$450,000; his two opponents, Norm Coleman & Skip Humphrey, spent a total of \$15 million.

**HOW THE GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN WORKED:**

- **Going direct.** Ventura used public appearances & media interviews to get his messages across. Along with running mate Mae Schunk, he appeared at numerous fairs, parades & local organization meetings.
- **Straight-up messages.** Honesty paid off during debates with other candidates. "He was far & away the best debater of all of the candidates," says Drewry. "That's why opponents avoided debating him. He's very smart & a quick thinker & he remembers the issues." His appeal to blue-collar workers & young people was enhanced by his candor & anti-establishment statements.
- **The Web as outreach.** *NYTimes* nicknamed Ventura "JFK of the Internet." Web site was used to build the campaign's state organization. Webmaster created "Jessenet," enabling voters to send/receive e-mail to Ventura. Campaign used the Internet to e-mail info about campaign stops, raise money (pulled in \$50,000 this way) & solicit volunteers to create the campaign database & work events.
- **Website was used as reference** for reporters & voters & is still operating, [www.jesseventura.org](http://www.jesseventura.org). Key voter issues were summarized, along with Ventura's answers, & posted.
- **Low budget effort.** 10 volunteers ran the campaign. Everyone worked out of home offices, because there was no official campaign headquarters. Most com'n happened thru e-mail, fax & phone.

Another sign of success: nearly 63% of Minn. voters went to the polls, rivaling turnout in a presidential year. (More from Drewry, 651/460-6755)