

**FASCINATING DIFFERENCES AMONG INDUSTRIES**

Healthcare CEOs place the strongest emphasis on

the company as a "brand." 76% strongly agree their company name is a brand that helps in the marketplace -- vs. 66% of all CEOs studied.

Technology companies pay more attention to marketing *products & services* as a benefit of reputation. 92% mention this as a benefit of reputation.

64% of manufacturing CEOs focus on global communication of reputation.

"Every public company measures earnings, return on investment & often customer satisfaction -- yet they don't measure reputation, something that affects many of these other measures," comments H&K-US CEO Tom Hoog.

**HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF KIDS AS OPINION LEADERS**

pr 2/8 discussed children emerging as opinion leaders. They're definitely influencing the development of new computer technology.

Wired News reports there's now a PC for preschoolers. Late last year, IBM & Rubbermaid began marketing a Young Explorer computer to parents of 3 to 7-yr-olds. It's a fully upgradeable, networkable computer & keyboard with CD-ROM, speakers & color monitor. The exterior is colorful plastic, to protect from spills. It's priced at \$2,299, so will only reach kids from families likely to be opinion leaders -- those with this kind of money.

**ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS**

¶ Bernays biog reminds of Eddie's negative feelings about polls. He wrote in '45 that real leaders "truly lead. But polls encourage pseudo-leaders, who in most cases are really followers, to keep on playing follow the leader. They help maintain the status quo -- which often needs changing."

- This also applies to studies that determine "norms," i.e., what's everyone else doing & how do we stack up? What exec or practitioner wants to settle for being average, which is what norms are?

¶ Basic psychological reason why participation is absolutely vital, not merely important or to be considered "if there's time," is the old saw Dale Yenn of Illinova (Decatur, Ill) reminded us of:

"If you ain't *in* on it, you're *down* on it"

**WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**DIED.** Chris Teahan, PRSA's retired vp of education, on March 11 in Avignon, France. Teahan was a founder of PRSSA in 1969 & a champion of students, educators &

pr education. He was staff counsel to the PRSA Educators Academy & to commissions which developed guidelines for pr study in U.S. colleges & universities.

**TECHNOLOGY: HEAVY ON MEDIA, LACKS ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRATION**

Practitioners (& others) often wonder whether the hi-tech gang are seers or just promoting their field. Here are some predictions to ponder from PRSA's Technology Conference:

1. "Strategic planning is dead," according to counselor Don Middleberg. Today, management doesn't want to be saddled by "cumbersome" strategic planning. Instead the mantra is "just do it!" Why? Because technology is driving the business, therefore making forecasting impossible
  - Has the world gone over completely to the "act, don't think" mentality? Should it? Is this the case in your work?
2. Kids aren't reading anymore & we're dealing with the MTV generation, Middleberg's alarmism continues. If you want to influence anyone born after 1980, the Internet is the only method
  - True, recent studies show books are bought more by folks over 40. But research shows 7 in 10 teenage girls are strongly influenced by magazines -- and they will shortly be adult consumers & voters
3. Great emphasis should be put on on-line management reputation strategies. Here's an action plan:
  - Begin with a research & monitoring program, including chat rooms, listservs and newsgroups, now dubbed "the global water cooler." Middleberg recommends, "Hire a kid, they're cheap & work hard."
  - Make sure you check out the boycott board (keyword *boycott* on any search engine).
  - Discuss & strategize those issues that surface negatively about your org'n that are worthy of a response.

**WHAT'S MISSING HERE:**

How to make your website a true piece of your system of com'n. There was no discussion at the conference of the role of employees, use of Intranets to communicate everyday, non-essential info plus serve as the library, or use of websites in a crisis situation.

It was all hi-tech as media -- & overuse of e-mail alone has brought that view into dispute. Are we being lured into wasteland by great toys?



## STRATEGIES & TACTICS FOR ADDRESSING ROGUE WEBSITES

Take one disgruntled employee &, for less than \$100, they can register a website using your orgn's name & attach it to any variation of "sucks.com" or similar vulgarities.

Rogue websites are proliferating, many aimed at leading org'ns. Since stopping them isn't easy -- & violates our First Amendment heritage -- here are some strategies for addressing them before or after they surface:

- **Rogue websites are a com'ns issue first & a legal issue second.** Work with legal counsel by keeping them in the loop, but you take the lead
- **Attempt to establish a dialogue with the creator** (includes those slamming your org'n in a chat room.) Here's where your legal team may play a role. Recent litigation against aol.com is paving the way to finding the sources behind legally *slandorous* "postings" more expeditiously
- **Activists are attempting to reserve these negative URL's & then scalp them to the disgruntled employee.** Some org'ns are beating these people to it. But be careful: legislation in Europe that will eventually make its way across the Atlantic says if you do not make it a working website within "x" number of days, the URL will go back on the market
- **When considering legal action, ask how serious is this?** What is the price of legal action? *Will this bring more unwanted publicity?*

**Best defense** against a rogue website: *quality products, superior customer service & happy employees.*

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## IR, PR & YOUR WEBSITE & E-MAIL -- A FINE LINE OF LEGALITIES

Courtroom use of them in U.S. v. Microsoft is resulting in a microscopic viewing of any orgn's website & e-mail -- & how they are used to communicate with internal & external stakeholders. Contributing factors:

- **Big Brother is watching:** in '98, 24 cases brought by the SEC, including one against a PR firm. At issue: sending e-mails on behalf of a client & not fully disclosing the representation
- **Prior to an IPO, a website can be viewed as a prospectus;** therefore adherence to strict guidelines will apply ([www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov), for more info)
- **Just because you press a delete button doesn't mean the e-mail is gone;** an outside pr firm's e-mails can be confiscated during a legal proceeding
- **One problem with e-mail:** too many shoot off messages without forethought, so language can be construed as "war-like," not relationship-building
- **Every org'n should have an e-mail policy,** no matter what, addressing retention, 2) deletion & 3) content. Software is now available to flag certain words deemed inappropriate by org'ns, for purposes of monitoring in-house confidentials, pornography & harassment instances

## REACHING JOURNALISTS USING TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY: YES, BUT ...

Some of the traditional "rules" still apply:

- Know who you are sending your releases/fact sheets to
- Know they cover the topic/issue you're promoting

If you think you're the only one sending releases via e-mail, think again. Some journalists are going so far as to have two e-mail addresses, one they know is filled with junk & one they give out to their "favorite" sources including passwords or coded phrases to use in subject lines as a gatekeeping mechanism.

## TIPS & TACTICS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY TO APPROACH A JOURNALIST:

- **Keep the phone calls & faxes coming**
- **E-mail is not the magic ticket,** it's a delete key closer to not being read at all. At least faxes still need to be physically handled & your headline may catch the reporter's eye
- **Be sure you include your phone numbers** when you do send material via e-mail. Journalists want to call, not get into a vicious circle of "e-mail tag." (This doesn't apply only to journalists. It's frustrating to get an e-mail from someone who doesn't include a return address or phone)
- **The subject line is crucial in an e-mail;** this is why journalists give out code words to insure they'll read the messages they want
- **When a journalist asks to be removed from a distribution list,** do it -- you're not nurturing the relationship by wasting their time

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## STUDY: CEOS NOT HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR ORGN'S REPUTATION

Ongoing Corporate Reputation Watch research series reveals boards of directors are not including the topic on their agendas. As non-financial indicators rise in import, this is a serious disjoint in corporate governance, notes the editor of *Chief Executive*, which sponsored the Yankelovich study with Hill & Knowlton. Findings:

1. 96% of the 650 CEOs queried say reputation is very important
2. Same percentage say their visibility is a key reputation factor
3. But less than 20% have mechanisms in place to measure reputation
4. However, 65% devote more time to reputation than 5 yrs ago
5. At 58% of the companies, the board doesn't hold the CEO accountable for corporate reputation
6. Stockholder feedback is a common method of evaluating reputation