

5. More & more consumers are using Web sites to help with purchase decisions
6. TV ads appear to influence the purchases of less expensive consumer goods such as medicine or athletic shoes.
7. Consumers are least likely to believe infomercials, tv talk shows, direct mail & celebrity endorsements

OTHER USEFUL FINDINGS

- Consumers are spending time researching purchases before deciding: 87% of consumers say they find out as much as possible before a major purchase.
- Highly educated consumers are more influenced by print media, particularly magazines, while tv is the primary source of product info among the less educated
- Men & women agree the wife has more influence on selecting a restaurant, deciding which brand of clothing to buy & where to shop
- Husbands take the lead when purchasing a car or computer
- Children are influential consumers (pr 2/8). They increasingly influence purchasing decisions for computers, breakfast cereals & clothing

Telephone interviews were conducted in Feb. with 1,007 adults (18+) across the U.S. (More from Wirthlin, 703/556-0001; www.wirthlin.com)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

- ¶ **New manual helps collect & measure data about work/life programs.** Published by the Boston College Center for Work & Family, *The Metrics Manual: Ten Approaches to Measuring Work/Life Initiatives* uses metrics to help practitioners measure & define productivity in work/life programs (for ex., billable hours, units produced, sales). Cost is \$100. (More from Kathy Lynch at the Center, 617/552-2865)
- ¶ **Publicity-seeker's bad taste, or acceptable?** Day of the tragedy in Littleton, pr received a fax release from Dr. Kevin Grold of the "1-800-Therapist Network" (Del Mar, Ca). The release begins "after a traumatic experience such as the one today in Colorado, there are certain mental health tasks that need consideration" & goes on to list ways to deal with emotions after a trauma. Last line of the release: "We have media-savvy therapists who specialize in helping through trauma -- just call us." Is capitalizing on a tragedy thru promotion of a spokesperson savvy pr -- or tasteless & disrespectful to the people you're "trying to help"? (It probably worked -- see lead article)
- ¶ **"PR Jobs Kit" helps organize searches for job seekers & org's seeking pr staff.** Includes mailing labels & a directory of exec recruiters & temp services serving pr, corp com's & mktg com's fields. Cost is \$50. (More from Corporate Communications Studies, 301/279-9455; www.corpcomstudies.com)

IN A DISASTER, ARE YOU PREPARED TO RESIST A MEDIA CIRCUS?

The Littleton school tragedy is a wakeup call for practitioners. Any school, business, hospital, post office, university et al could be the site of deranged persons with lethal weaponry. And the final straw is the media frenzy that follows -- & fixes your organization in stakeholders' minds in possibly a very negative, or embarrassing, or pitiable way.

- Count the pages your newspaper devoted, & time given by your tv station
- Multiply that across the continent. Then ask:
- What would you do with hundreds of journalists all over the place for several days?

ELEMENTS OF A DISASTER PLAN

Today this goes beyond conventional emergency planning. Beyond issue anticipation -- tho it will have elements of both. And org's also need discreet versions of both as well. Some suggestions:

1. **Keep media at bay, you set the rules.** Some will say it can't be done, but recent cases suggest it can (e.g. pr 9/14/98). Your disaster is a legitimate news story. But feasting on it for a week is no one's right
 - Remember, they'll be back on the anniversary(ies) & whenever there's a similar tragedy somewhere else, so set the tone for them at the start
 - There may also be trials and/or lawsuits to drag the story out
2. **It's your property, even if you're a public entity.** Set the rules for where reporters & cameras can be, & maybe even when -- then get tough with the first trespassers
3. **Plan with your police & fire dep'ts in advance.** Request their help when the onslaught of voyeur reporters comes. They'll agree local folk deserve protection from this. Yes, include the fire dep't -- since the incident may well involve them, or they may have to reinforce the police. Don't forget other reinforcement possibilities: sheriffs & state police
4. **Prepare in advance a packet for affected families** telling them how to avoid the media, & why they have every right to do so. Note the posture of the parents of the alleged Littleton perpetrators; they refused to talk at all. Include facts about their property & privacy rights, also
5. **Prepare a similar letter or packet for employees, maybe neighbors, too**
6. **Prepare your CEO.** If he or she were shown on tv decrying the media prying, depicting microphones shoved in the faces of grieving relatives, the people en masse would cheer: "At last, someone told it straight"



7. Prepare yourself by identifying helpers to be dragooned -- to deliver the packets, deal with infractions etc, while you handle what you consider to be the right amount of media coverage & determine how to disseminate it

8. Have a set media strategy on the shelf. Think about pool coverage. Regularly timed briefings or media conferences. And decide what type, & what level, of coverage will be useful to your org'n (& possibly the victims' families, in a commemorative way) -- then work toward it:

➤ **Mourning** -- in the proper amount, but not every funeral so it becomes maudlin & counterproductive; local media are most important here

➤ **Clear understanding the org'n wasn't at fault**, if true; if not, then the most sincere regret & concern for the victims et al

➤ **Your plan to get on with life** -- & better yet, to use the tragedy as a lesson learned for devising preventatives against recurrences

How to destroy First Amendment rights. 88% believe media sensationalize too often (pr 4/5). Trust in media is at 17%. Put that together with cases like Littleton et al. Then factor in large majorities who tell survey after survey they believe limits ought to be put on the First Amendment. Media are shooting themselves in the foot.

9. Check your plan out with community leaders & elected officials.

Remember the downside when W.R. Grace didn't (pr 2/22)

IS ANYONE HELPED BY THE MEDIA CIRCUS?

Certainly not survivors or victims' kin. Not the community, nor the org'n involved. Not even media, since research shows audiences are getting angry about this behavior. Voyeurism has its limits -- especially with opinion leaders, the ones who matter. Can't media elsewhere use pix & feed from media where the event occurred?

Journalists rationalize by saying "they want to talk to us." Some egoists or spotlight seekers may. But for those who need catharsis, there are far better places to get it than from a reporter -- & these are the distraught folks journalists seek out & exploit.

■ **An extraordinary number of local & national columnists & ed page writers have attacked the Littleton over-coverage** & the intrusive aspects of much of it. As one said, all this trampling on people's lives & rights to appease advertisers' demand for numbers & Wall Street's demand for a better next quarter. Ironically, most pointed out that reporters on the assignment hate it, too -- but editors today report to business managers

■ **Would it matter if papers around the country used the same wire service photos**, instead of flying in photographers? Or if the networks all used pool footage? Viewers can only watch one newscast at a time so wouldn't even know -- or care. And who reads the *Seattle Times* and *Miami Herald* on the same day, so readers wouldn't know or care either

■ **Media developed a Tragedy Industry**, says one writer -- thus the need for practitioners to prepare disaster plans

¶ OF RELATED INTEREST: BOSTON TV STATIONS TO LIMIT COVERAGE

Boston police media dir. Det. Sgt. Margot Hill watched live coverage of a SWAT team raid almost turn to disaster. A reporter said the team was going in the back door -- & the suspects inside could have been watching. "You just wanted to say, 'Oh, my God, she just potentially got 5 officers killed.'"

Her response was to approach tv news directors to work out a reasonable policy. Tho voluntary, Boston's 7 tv & several radio outlets pledge to abide by "Partnership Agreement for Responsible Broadcasting." It:

- Sets coverage guidelines for hostage situations
- Allows no live pictures of SWAT teams & no live footage of escaping victims
- Permits no cell phone interviews during the event as occurred with students inside the school during the Littleton tragedy

Agreement began a few months ago. *San Francisco Chronicle* calls it "among the first in this age of ratings-driven television." Portland (Ore) & Tampa have similar pacts. LA could use one for its relentless helicopter coverage of police chases.

Quid pro quo gives tv crews location "within the inner perimeter" of the action for a pool camera, guaranteed access where possible & regular updates from police.

"No story is more important than someone's life," says WBZ news director Peter Brown. One Littleton example:

- Live footage showed a bloodied student dangling from a window. Seen by the attackers, this could have endangered the youth & his SWAT team rescuers by showing their precise location

PR STILL MORE POWERFUL THAN ADVERTISING, SURVEY FINDS

Word-of-mouth is still the greatest influence on purchasing decisions -- which cutting-edge pr increasingly aims at stimulating. A survey by Wirthlin Worldwide shows that most consumers (52%) said the recommendation of a friend carries more weight than just about any other source. The study also proves what practitioners already know -- that pr is a more powerful influence on consumers than advertising:

1. 3/4ths of respondents say ads stretch the truth
2. News articles are more believable than advertising, say 8 in 10
3. Magazine articles tend to have the most influence on people buying durable goods such as computers or cars because of their ability to present in-depth comparisons
4. On investment decisions, newspaper articles have the greatest influence