

GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Asked what will be effective in changing this dire trend, large

majorities support programs that are increasingly the focus of pr's community & philanthropic initiatives:

Initiative	Very effective	Somewhat	Total
◆ Improve the public schools	68%	26%	94%
◆ After school programs & centers	60	33	93
◆ Flexible work schedules for parents	59	31	91
◆ Boy Scouts, YMCA, volunteer org's	52	40	92

Only 25% see shortage of gov't programs that support kids as a very serious problem -- tho another 40% view it as somewhat serious. Clearly, the stage is set for practitioners' efforts.

(Study, Kids These Days '99, online at www.publicagenda.org; 212/686-6610)

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **Lawyers propose changing bar rules to allow them into consulting a la accounting firms.** Partnerships & fee-sharing with other professionals would be permitted by Amer Bar Ass'n proposal. This would allow lawyers to get into consulting. But accounting & consulting firms could also practice law under the proposal. NYTimes reports division among attorneys on the issue, some saying clients want 1-stop shopping for all consulting needs, others fearing it's not in clients' interest. Accounting firms already practice law outside the US -- with Pricewaterhouse Coopers' 1,663 lawyers making it the 3rd largest law firm in the world. As if pr counselors didn't have enough competition!

¶ **The Web: An unbelievable medium in more than one way.** A salesman selling woodstoves, whose volume is up several times because of intelligent people who are afraid of Y2K, reports when he asks them where they got this idea they say they got it online. The computer is having a double Y2K effect: software is the cause of the problem, messages sent on it cause specific issues. Computerholics are spreading Y2K fear & confusion. That may be what the Net is all about in the present stage of its development -- an unguided, unfiltered information source. Like advertising & promotion, it works best on the gullible.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Named initial members of CPRS College of Fellows, David Eisenstadt, The Communications Group (Toronto) & Charles Tisdall, consultant (Toronto). Other top CPRS honors: Don Rennie Memorial Award to Steve Flanagan, Hydro-Quebec (Montreal); Shield of Public Service to Linda Bartz, Vancouver

Hospital & Health Sciences Ctr; Novikoff Memorial Award to Jean Freeman, SpeakEasy Enterprises (Regina).

Joan Schneider, pres, Schneider & Assocs (Boston), awarded Boston Univ College of Com'n's Distinguished Alumni Award.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH A TWIST: MEASURING PERCEPTION SHIFTS USING PRE- & POST-QUESTIONNAIRES

A municipal utility, challenged with the need to explain its exempt status relative to dereg legislation, conducted **educational focus groups** with a broad range of constituents, including small businesses, large industrials, longtime customers & new residents.

As usual, an independent facilitator probed general knowledge levels about the utility, perceptions about customer service & the likely impact of deregulation. Then a utility rep gave a brief presentation & answered customer questions -- a golden opportunity for:

- a) face-to-face dialogue with customers
- b) testing content of the presentation (were key messages understood?)
- c) issue anticipation (as customers voiced their concerns)

THE TWIST: ON-THE-SPOT MEASUREMENT

To capitalize on this rarely available opportunity -- getting

responses *before* & immediately *after* information is shared in a group setting -- participants filled out questionnaires *before* and immediately *after* the focus group. Upon agreeing to participate, surveys were sent -- which 70% returned. The rest either brought them along or filled them out on arrival.

- This allows measurement of current perceptions -- but also, any *movement* in those perceptions as a result of the group discussion
- Which is how most people make judgments -- by listening to peers whose opinions they trust & respect
- Also enables tracking the persistence of, or lack of, groupthink; to what degree are people thinking for themselves, or being influenced?

Key to the process is the line of questioning used to identify likely behaviors:

- What *triggering events* would cause a customer to stay or go, if they had the choice?
- What is the *pre-disposition to switch utilities* based on past behavior (e.g., have they changed phone companies? Do they shop at superstores?)
- *Information-sparked behaviors* -- if customers received information from the utility, did they do anything differently because of it?



OUTCOMES: WHAT THE ORGANIZATION GOT

- **Baseline reading** of knowledge levels & perceptions
- **Relationship-building** opportunity with customers
- **Effective forum** for communicating & testing complicated information
- **Insights** into customer receptivity to new programs & services
- **Ideas** on how to communicate more effectively -- straight from those receiving the communication!

Utility then closed the loop by sharing results with employees, who are charged with delighting customers in the new competitive environment.

As it becomes ever more difficult to recruit focus groups -- also the case in getting responses to mail or phone surveys -- making the most of research opportunities is important. Trick is to do it without skewing data by wearying participants with too many questions or repeated surveys.

SUPERMARKET DROPS ADS, USES 20/80 RULE & CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Would you dare "weed out all those people who weren't regular customers"? Dorothy Lane Mkts (Dayton) did, then designed a super loyalty program for the regulars, as *Fast Company* magazine reports in its June issue. Details:

1. "Club DLM" treats best customers to flowers, turkeys at Thanksgiving, concerts, Christmas gifts
2. Runs no ads because specials on products only draw "cherry pickers" who fill the store & get in the way of the regulars
3. Takes 20/80 rule (20% of customers give 80% of the volume, & vice versa) to new limits, segmenting by top 100 biggest spenders, top 5000 etc. with special attentions at each level
4. Purchases are computer tracked intensely, to permit offering specific individuals specific special deals
5. Special events add the essential retail marketing ingredient, entertainment. Kids Club brings 'em in on Saturdays, Baby Derby crowns the swiftest crawler
6. Lifetime customers now elderly get free delivery (at a loss to the store)
7. Consumer advisory board, with members' photos at store entrance, evaluate one dep't at each meeting, travel to benchmark other stores
8. Employees are motivated to offer customer delight, e.g. giving speeches on cheesemaking or wine tips, visiting a cattle ranch to learn about beef

"We may have stopped advertising, but we haven't stopped communicating," says chain's dir info. (More from www.dorothylane.com & the magazine)

RESULTS:

1. An extra 3 points of gross margin, which can be given back to best customers
2. Store can focus on customers rather than on competition -- without bothering to track everyone's ads & align prices to compete

SCENARIO TECHNIQUE FOR VISUALIZING ISSUES GETS SOPHISTICATED

International pr educator, researcher & counselor Jon White (London) told CPRS conference scenarios can be used in strategy development, issue anticipation & crisis mgmt "to prepare managers for future events & approaches to attempting to manage them or their effects." (See pr 3/14/94 & 1/6/92) They differ from speculating about the future by:

- Imposing discipline on guesswork
- Limiting the number of variables to be considered (ideally 3 or 4)
- Demanding evidence to support assertions about variables & their interactions

Techniques like scenarios are vital because pr is "not a com'n practice, pure & simple" but "more about understanding social context & social action, about knowing how to act to change group behavior."

ONE PR FIRM'S SCENARIO MODEL

The way to find foresight, says Kerry Tucker (Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, San Diego) is by creating multi-scenario possibilities. This means "creating stories of equally plausible futures," then planning for them. In an era of unrelenting change, you'll be ready. Highlights of the advantages:

- Putting trends in some kind of logical story form creates a fresh sense of understanding
- Scenarios are "what if" stories, taking the most pressing forces on your org'n & putting them together in a narrative
- Once you know the alternative futures, you can plan for them; otherwise strategic planning is "scratching at the surface"

(Copy of "Scenario Planning," Tucker's article in *Association Management*, from him at 619/296-0605 or results@nstpr.com)

STUDY: BOTH ADULTS & TEENS NEGATIVE ABOUT KIDS TODAY, BUT ...

Not good news in latest iteration of ongoing Public Agenda study of & about youth. Fielded in Dec, before Colorado school shootings, study found we see children as lazy, spoiled (53%, & ironically 58% by parents). Teens are rude, irresponsible, wild (71%, 74% parents).

- Are parents more negative because they're closer to kids -- or are they saying they've lost control?

Everyone agrees the next generation will not make this a better place.