

Also, 71% of sr mgrs say they "actively integrate com'ns into their overall business strategy. Somewhat contradicts other findings.

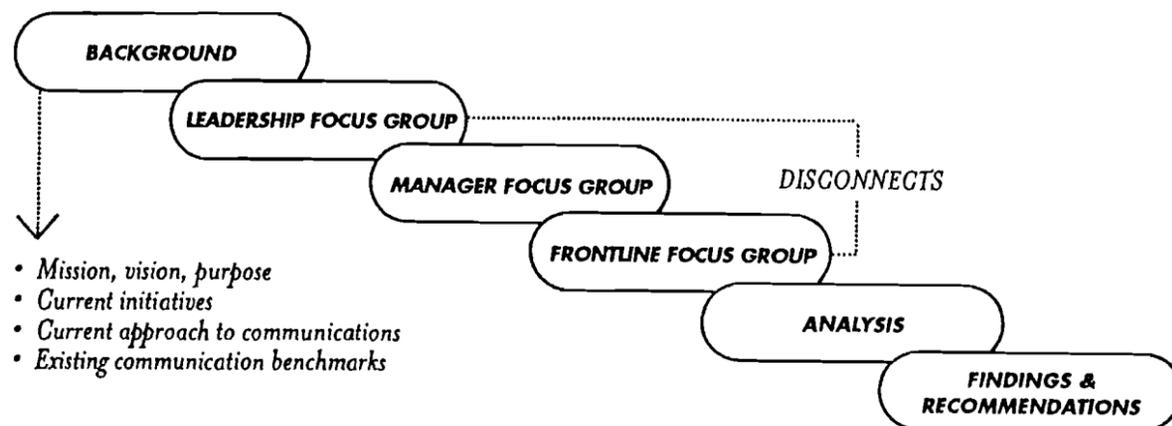
Finally, a mixed blessing: Respondents cite e-mail as the most frequently tool (90%) -- but not the most effective (55%).

Apparently, there's still great opportunity for practitioners to add value, despite talk within the field in recent years suggesting the internal relations issue was being successfully addressed if not resolved. 913 org'ns participated, half over 5000 employees, 26% under 1000. (Copy of 1999 Com'ns Study, Catalog no. W-252, from 1/800/388-9868)

## CONTRASTING FOCUS GROUP METHOD FOR INTERNAL COM'N

"A clear indicator of the com'ns problems that may be affecting the bottomline is the gap between what leadership is saying & what the rest of the org'n is doing," notes Christine Luporter of O'Connor Kenny Partners (Memphis).

She uses a series of formal focus groups with 1) leadership, 2) managers & 3) frontline employees. "Done right, these focus groups can measure the gaps in understanding & point to the biggest opportunities to improve."



## ITEM OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ Does e-mail create expectations of such instant response it affects v-mail? Counselor John Graham asks, "What do you hear when you call someone's business voicemail? More than likely, the message sounds something like this: 'I'm away from my desk right now. I'll get back to you as soon as I can.' That was good enough *before* the Internet impacted our expectations. But not today. The words sound almost arrogant." Hmmm... E-mail basically leaves messages, too. Few if any keep their computers continually tuned in, so the sender gets a message at a later time when the message is picked up. And many prefer v-mail for the ability to verbalize a message then & there, vs. having to write an e-mail, fax or memo. V-mail surely has problems -- particularly routing systems where you never can reach a live voice. What's the balance here?

## TACTICS: WHY DON'T AGGLOMERATED STATISTICS ACTIVATE PEOPLE?

Presidential candidate Bill Bradley, proposing gun controls aimed at keeping them from children, attempts to dramatize the need by noting that 13 children are killed *daily* by guns in the US -- the equivalent of 365 Columbines each year. When that number were killed in the Colorado high school shootings, it unleashed a media, school safety & legislative frenzy.

- Why does no one seem to care when the same number die, in a single day (just as at Columbine), but one at a time in separate locations?

The equivalent of 2 loaded 747s "crash" every single day, anti-smoking advocates regularly point out, comparing the number of smokers dying every day. Imagine if there was even a *single* 747 crash every month!

- But no one seems to get upset about all these local, separate deaths. Local media don't cover them (except as obits, which in most media still don't give cause of death). The grapevine isn't full of it. Smokers dying of their habit is commonplace. Only their loved ones notice.

Yet the actual impact on society -- as opposed to the sensational impact -- is as great as if there were a major numerical tragedy. One can even argue that it is easier on the survivors in a dramatic tragedy, because so many others share their grief. It's lonely when you mourn a single death, even when it's tragic & needless.

## THE PLACE IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE NUMBERS

If a child is shot at school, or on the playground, local outrage will occur. The same child shot on the street may be mostly ignored. This is particularly true if it happens in NYC, LA, Chicago. Too common -- we've become inured.

- Flip side: a tragic event (or a positive one) with some special angle that occurs in these cities will be brought to the attention of the world -- because they're media centers

**Case in point:** an 11-yr old was grabbed & killed last year by a group of dogs while boarding his school bus -- with his mates witnessing the grisly outrage. If ever there was a time to get effective animal control policies, this was it. But it was p.36. Happened in a small town.

Or, compare the response to Columbine with civilians killed by NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. 15 died at the school. As of the same date, 200 had been killed by the bombs -- often large numbers per incident. Many more



were injured or crippled. These tragedies were reported; & talked about in some circles -- pacifists, Serbian émigré communities, opponents of the US policy. Many were youth -- as at Columbine. Proof again that all news is local (or, in this case national v. international).

#### MESSAGE STRATEGY CHANGES AS PUBLICS BECOME TIRED

Groups trying the analogies above are rightly recognizing that it takes Big Stuff today to get attention or

activate publics. Overcommunication & overbusyness are part of it, of course. There are other factors, which apply to all message creation now:

1. Daily recitation of rape, robbery, murder, train wreck etc by news media has dulled people's appetite for legitimate outrages. Study your direct mail appeals to see how far the pleas often go to motivate you
2. Despite the lack of *national* or *regional* attention to local occurrences, the never-ending stream of gory news is pushing many to the point where they will only pay attention if it is local -- & touches them or some place or person nearby
3. Analogizing local situations to highly publicized events begins to take on an air of, "Aw, c'mon now" -- again, because publics are tired of it

#### STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS UNDER THESE CONDITIONS

A. Back to the grassroots -- because that's where local resides. E.g., if gun control advocates organized locally, every time any child is killed by guns they'd be there to lead the outrage in that community. This could have the cumulative effect needed to pass state or national laws -- because lawmakers would be reacting to events in their districts, rather than vague national data.

B. Work on the obit editors -- because truly cumulative, local data will be communicated this way. Suppose every death by cancer was so noted or by drug use, smoking, gun homicide, AIDS etc. Org'ns working to eliminate deadly lifestyles or diseases have done some of this. It may require dealing with squeamish publics as well, possibly certain religious groups. Editors may want to insert a regular notice explaining why they're doing it. Whatever it takes, this will have an effect.

C. Try understatement instead of shouting. Both symbolic acts & rhetoric today are viewed with disdain, and when they go overboard become counterproductive. Example:

- Pro-lifers once ran soft sell ads & publicity telling of babies that presentday mothers might well abort when family circumstances or amniocentesis predicts their truly awful conditions. The punch line was, "You would have killed Beethoven!" or whomever. Powerful; likely to reach the fence sitters they need to target

- Now their fringe element bombs clinics or parades fetuses in bottles

#### BRANDING'S DOWNSIDE: IT ENLARGES THE TARGET FOR ISSUES

Branding isn't always a good strategy -- despite the renewed emphasis from marketers. It's one thing for goods & services, quite another for org'ns -- and the latter is where much new branding is occurring. Even healthcare networks feel they need a brand name.

- The drivers are the assumed need to demonstrate size & therefore strength; or to show reach across a geographic area; or to imply high quality by linking lesser known entities to one with a good reputation
- But this linking becomes an albatross when a disaster or issue hits part of the branded network -- because the brand is a symbol for reputation
- Reputation today is as much issue dependent as it is awareness dependent. Improving awareness by branding links all the elements on which the brand has been affixed, so when issues occur it's impossible not to keep them from spreading across the entire branded network

#### PLENTY OF EVIDENCE THAT ISSUES DRIVE BRANDS

Columbia-HCA assembled the largest hospital

network & appeared to be dominating the industry, or at least making for-profit healthcare acceptable. One hospital was accused of Medicare fraud -- & suddenly the entire chain was suspect. Result: the units remaining after an organizational meltdown have reverted to their local names used before they were acquired.

Waste Management Inc. similarly conglomerated the waste disposal business. But getting a huge collection of former mom-&-pop operations to function like a national company proved difficult. A downturn in pricing started to cause problems in some local units -- and when mgmt relied on creative accounting to downplay these "temporary" setbacks, WMI fell apart. It was acquired by a much smaller competitor & internal bickering at the highest levels continues.

Nestle's baby formula scams in 3<sup>rd</sup> world nations is a case where branding got an entire company's product line attacked & boycotted. Consumers didn't stop buying only formula but all its other products as well.

#### STUDY: EMPLOYEE RELATIONS NOT AS WELL ACCEPTED AS APPEARS

Only half (51%) of high-performing org'ns have "well-defined com'ns strategies that allow employees to better understand" business goals, finds a study by IABC & Watson Wyatt Worldwide. More bad news:

1. Only 52% of sr mgrs "recognize & support strong corporate com'ns programs" to achieve business goals
2. Long range com'ns planning & measurement are still lacking at many org'ns

#### SOME GOOD NEWS

Employee com'ns is moving from hr (22%) to pr (46%) [tho study uses term "corp com'ns dep'ts"]