

- **Trust & confidence in leadership** – which the study finds a major driver of commitment – shows a similar contradiction. Companies with high trust gained 3-yr TRS of 108%, 42% superior than those with low trust (66%). But only 50% of workers report having high trust

#### A MANAGEMENT CULTURE THAT EARNS TRUST INCLUDES 7 FACTORS:

1. Explaining the reasons behind major decisions (10%)
2. Promoting the most qualified employees (10%)
3. Gaining support for the business direction (10%)
4. Motivating workforce to high performance (10%)
5. Acting on employee suggestions (9%)
6. Providing job security (9%)
7. Encouraging employee involvement (8%)

Significant is the nearly equal importance of all 7 elements, as identified by multiple regression analysis – when some experts say 1 or 2 points are key. (All other factors account for the remaining 34%)

Watson Wyatt's Work USA database – “largest, statistically representative & most up-to-date” survey of American workers – measures 6 key indicators of employee commitment: whether workers are 1) satisfied with their job & 2) their employer; 3) are proud to work there; 4) would recommend the org'n to others; 5) would stay if offered a comparable position elsewhere; 6) rate their employer superior to others. Tho workers in corporations are studied, results appear applicable to any type org'n. (More from [www.watsonwyatt.com](http://www.watsonwyatt.com))

#### ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Cabbies as Opinion Leaders** is shown again by the owner of Chicago's Gold Coast Dogs restaurant. Every day for a year he took a 5-min cab ride & talked up his eatery. He reports nearly every cabbie in town brings him customers. Remember when Indianapolis' mayor used cab drivers to lift the city out of the economic development doldrums by promoting the attractions & quality of life there to visitors? Some opinion leaders aren't necessarily movers & shakers, but have unparalleled networking opportunities. They get around by just sitting there.

#### WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**DIED.** Farley Manning, founder of Manning Selvage & Lee. When he was head of this major pr firm, he liked to tell about beginning his career as a cub reporter on a tiny daily in NH, *The Claremont Eagle*. Kathleen Kukuca (Nordson Corp), Cleveland PRSA leader.

**HONORS.** CPRS' Don Rennie Memorial Award to Lois Reimer (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, Vancouver); Lamp of Service to David Fraser Likely (Likely Communication Strategies, Ottawa); CPRS Lectern to CPRS Edmonton.

#### NOTICE TO READERS

Following our tradition, pr reporter will not be published next week to allow our printer & members of our staff a well-deserved break. Our office will be open for business, however, so call, fax or e-mail your requests.

#### CREATING A BUZZ: TEMPORARY PHENOMENON OR HERE TO STAY? ONLY FOR DOT-COMS OR GENERALLY APPLICABLE NOW?

Backsliding to boiler room publicity tactics for hi-tech startups – in order to create a buzz, as they call it – is viewed by many in the field as pulling pr down to commodity level. Still, it has its logic – even if the tactics are antediluvian (& harshly attacked in a spate of recent books, articles & speeches):

- **Startups usually have no customers**, sometimes no finished product – but lots of venture capital funding, since there seems to be more of that than there are places to put it, particularly when the fad for investment is hi-tech & almost nothing else
- **Startups thus need to** 1) locate customers or 2) bring in folks with a need who may help perfect the product, & above all 3) keep investors quiet by showing *something* is happening, namely publicity & apparent creation of visibility

These are precisely the first-stage jobs publicity does well. Buzz, it appears, while it may be ethically challenged if there's nothing behind it, makes perfect sense in these circumstances. And creating awareness has always been the initial task in every project – & the first step in formal systems like Diffusion Process ([pr 1/6/86](#)) & the Behavioral Model ([pr 11/4/96](#)).

However, hi-tech companies that survive & attain longevity – H-P, IBM, Intel, Cisco, etc – need all the sophisticated pr tools Old Economy org'ns do, whether they be corporations, public agencies or NPOs. Buzz then has a limited role, if any. Reputation or brand now matter, and that *is* another matter where pr strategy is concerned.

#### IMPACT ON WHO COMES INTO PR

The answer to whether the buzz strategy is ephemeral or not in pr is vital because the burn-em-out buzzing jobs may be influencing who comes into the field. What they do. Whether they will remain – & mature. Most in the hi-tech pr firms & staffers in e-companies are very young. PR grads can get good paying jobs immediately. So can others with minimal or no pr training.

- **Maybe this isn't bad** – except that the fiery baptism offers little or no insight to what mature pros need to be able to do, so maybe university pr sequences will bend to teaching the field this way under pressure from students eager for jobs
- **But undergrad pr sequences really ought to be considered *pre-pr*** – a la pre-law or pre-med. The few hours of pre-professional coursework available at this level, when basic college education must be the emphasis, argues more & more for either graduate training as the accepted norm or 5-yr undergrad sequences

Is the buzz culture leading us away from this professional maturity, simply because it provides jobs for the huge numbers who now study pr?



## DOES THE PRIMACY OF INNOVATION SUGGEST BUZZ IS NOT TEMPORARY?

If e-tools are not bringing us the Communication Revolution, as is generally thought, but rather are creating a process & medium that make possible the Innovation Revolution, in every realm of life (pr 3/20), could this mean:

- **Buzz will be here to stay** since infinite numbers of new products, services, ideas, systems, etc will constantly be thrown at society – not just more e-toys?
- **The whole world will live in Startup Mode**, not just the e-world, & it will involve not only investment capital chasing new commercial opportunities but parents coveting new education approaches, patients eager for healthcare breakthroughs, citizens tired of old ways of governance et al?
- **Yet isn't this the situation already** – incipient if not fully achieved?
- **Since most new products & ideas fail**, will all the resulting buzz anger stakeholders by adding immeasurably to the overcommunication many already find unbearable – making it even harder for practitioners to break thru the clutter?

Predictable – whether buzz is here to stay or a blip (just an ancient idea hyped with a new name) – is continuing bifurcation between “real” full-bodied public relations & “buzz” pr. The challenge remains:

1. **Finding effective ways to gain awareness & attention** in an overcommunicated society
2. **Not letting this lull the field into anointing awareness** as the only or the most important skill of the profession; pr has been there, done that

This is truly déjà vu all over again, as everyone knows who's been in the field for awhile. The difference is that the buzzers – & their clients & employers – have not. Like all neophytes, they believe new ground is being broken. Old heads need to gently show them nothing has changed except 1) the terminology and – most important for all – 2) the incredible speed with which innovation comes at us. In that arena, maybe the buzzers will find techniques all practitioners can learn from.

E-startups have advanced the profession in one important way: they recognize the essential role of pr, even if it is basic awareness or buzz pr. *Often the first person hired by them is the pr pro.*

## RESEARCH TECHNIQUE ASKS SUBJECTS TO DEFINE THEMSELVES, PROVIDES TANGIBLE EVIDENCE ABOUT GEN X & Y PERCEPTIONS

To get rich research results, give survey subjects money & a camera, and let them have fun. Trend forecasters Brand Futures Group (BFG) used this method to gain insight into how Generations X & Y perceive themselves – & their consuming behavior. Their client wanted tangible evidence of how the next wave of consumers view their lives & to understand how to reach this audience down the road.

The client's previous research was abstract, too far removed. “The findings made sense, but they didn't reveal insights that would inspire creative thinking,” says dir Marian Salzman. “Nothing offered the spark needed to project ideas for the future.” The client wanted results that could be shuffled like a deck of cards into multiple formats.

## HANDS ON PARTICIPATION, NOT E-SURVEYING

BFG decided to skip the on-line route, which is in some ways still foreign. “Clients never fully believed these were real people on the other end giving feedback to questions.”

So, the “Generation in a Box” project conducted research on 30 X-ers and Y-ers ages 15 to 30 & comprised of the following components:

1. **Cameras.** BFG sent fling cameras to people recruited for the survey with instructions on exactly what types of photos they should take (an important item, a favorite car, etc)
2. **Spending Spree.** BFG sent money with instructions on what items people were to purchase – postcards, magnets, magazines, jeans, etc. that would “represent who you are.” (Side note: 8 guys from very different backgrounds & different locations across the US sent in the same AOL “You've Got Mail” magnet)
3. **Collage.** Each respondent ripped out magazine pages & found objects to represent who they are
  - **BFG rented a loft in New York for 3 days & assembled the project into a presentation.** In the entrance hall, each subject's headshot was blown up with their name, age, city & job written underneath (e.g., “Brad, 29, Menasha, Wis, sales). In this way, as the client walked into the room, she virtually met each respondent to the survey. Then she would see photos, collages & printed cards that displayed ideas like “My Generation Now” and “My Generation Next.”
  - **The presentation next went to the client's hq** for the entire company to see & experience, then went on tour with TV monitors, music & a skateboarding video backdrop. “The client really loved it,” BFG's Sheri Radel told pr. “It went from NYC then to California. It got a great response. It could be resurrected at any time.”

## ETHNOGRAPHIC TOOL

“We actually use this method quite a bit,” she says. It's an “ethnographic” tool – “a great way to gain insight into people.”

But there is one admitted downside to the methodology: it works best on subjects who have time on their hands, i.e., students, the wealthy & the unemployed. Harried parents & professionals with demanding jobs and/or families may not have time to run around taking photos, writing diaries & expounding in other ways on likes and dislikes.

## ONGOING STUDY SHOWS EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT MAY BE MOST POWERFUL NONFINANCIAL INDICATOR DUE TO BOTTOMLINE LINK

Commitment of employees is directly tied to shareholder value – but only half of workers are committed to their employer. This gap is identified in the latest Work USA study. For practitioners it identifies another opportunity to install Team Leader as Communicator (pr 1/1/96) & other programs proven to enhance commitment. The data:

- **3-yr total return to shareholders (TRS)** of companies with high employee commitment is 112% – 22% better than average commitment (90%) & 36% better than low commitment (76%). *Even the most assiduous bean counter can love these numbers & support pr efforts targeted at worker commitment*
- **16% of employees on average are not committed & 29% are neutral** – but 55% are committed to their employer