

attraction," he feels. But budget constraints felled the project. AK hopes to resurrect the idea at a later date.

- For years critics of award programs have urged honoring practitioners willing to share what *failed* – based on research showing we learn better from our failures than our successes. This is a start.

## ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Another Case Where Word-of-Mouth Rules** is the rise of alternative medicine. Mark Blumenthal, exec dir, American Botanical Council (Austin) says "A big reason – possibly the biggest – for the popularity of alternative therapies is good W-O-M support. People tell their friends that their doctors couldn't relieve their menstrual cramps or shoulder tendonitis but that an acupuncturist, or homeopath or hypnotherapist did." Despite continuing opposition from allopathic docs, these therapies are booming. Mainline medical associations & journals are even beginning to give grudging recognition.

¶ **Pioneering Scholar: We Must Be More Careful With Research on Internet Usage** than we have been with tv studies. Guido Stempel III writes that the industry's Nielsen ratings gave an inaccurate picture of who was actually watching programs or ads. And they offered no demographic data. In *Journalism & Mass Com'n Quarterly* he notes "We used the ratings to say 21% of the people watching are interested in buying a Chevrolet. This was an inference of Olympic proportions." The Ohio U scholar fears the same may be occurring with studies of Net usage. But gathering demographic info will require site owners to make their records public – something he fears may not happen. Thus Net usage data will be as untrustworthy & incomplete as tv audience data is.

¶ **Banned in Boston Is Still Boon to the Banned.** Will they never learn? NYC Mayor Giuliani has again been a big help to the Brooklyn Museum by vociferously attacking another work of art. When he did this two years ago to the "Sensation" exhibition – a collection, incidentally, amassed by an ad/pr agency owner – it prompted the largest turnout ever for a show there. This time the issue is a photo mural by a recognized photographer titled "Yo Mama's Last Supper" – in which a naked woman is posed as Jesus. Last time Hizzoner went to court (& lost twice on First Amendment grounds). This time he's appointing a "decency standards" committee – which critics promptly called censorship. Dignifying & validating that which we oppose by giving it major public awareness is as counter-productive today as when Boston's "Watch & Ward Society" tried to close any play they didn't feel met their standards. Since Boston was where Broadway theatricals went for tryouts, producers & playwrights would tuck in a slightly sexy scene or a bit of strong language so they could advertise the show as banned in Boston. Never failed to pack 'em in.

¶ **With New PR Hires, a Deal's No Longer a Deal.** Exec search & mgmt consultants Goldman Group (NYC) says today's contract negotiations are characterized by fickleness & infidelity. The combined forces of a shortage of knowledge, shortage of workers, a still surging if cooling economy & the recent dot.com frenzy are rewriting the old rules. "A new paradigm is emerging to replace the diminishing idea that one's word is one's bond," says pres Elaine Goldman. "**Let's call the emerging paradigm, 'I changed my mind.'**" Part of the trend stems from the waning loyalty factor. While Baby Boomers were raised with notions of solid job growth, Gen-Xers – many of who saw parents downsized – think of a job as a gig. An individual may have 10 to 20 gigs in a lifetime. Furthermore, they don't trust organizations. "Baby boomers should take their cue from the clear eyed cynicism displayed by the Gen-Xers." For their part, employers can't expect lifers anymore & should work to keep hires happy & comfortable for the time during which they have them.

## ACTIVISTS' ON-LINE EFFECTIVENESS DEMONSTRATES A NEW WAY TO MOBILIZE KEY PUBLICS

Practitioners can take a cue from activists on how to mobilize key publics to become advocates. Ross Irvine, pres, ePublic Relations Ltd, believes pr too often strives just to *inform & update* employees, stakeholders, opinion leaders & other key supporters, when the real goal should be providing these players with training & tools to *use the info effectively* on your behalf.

### SOCIAL ACTIVISTS DO THIS WELL

"The challenge for pr is to adapt this knowledge to meet the needs of clients & employers," Irvine

says. "The first step is to give key audiences the necessary info & tools. The second is to let go & let the process unfold." Social activists manage to do this. Their effectiveness is evidenced daily in media coverage, in mobilizing marches & protests & in the eagerness of regulators to endorse their causes.

- **One key to their effectiveness is Web access.** Training materials used by activists are available on-line. Examples include: a) *The Virtual Activist: A Training Course by NetAction*, & b) *Handbook For Action: A guide to safely removing genetically modified plants from release sites in Britain*, by genetiX snowball

- **Practitioners should study these materials.** "*The Virtual Activist* has hundreds of links to additional resources, is a comprehensive 'virtual classroom' to teach activists how to use the Internet." Apply it to *your* "activists". Not only can it help guide Web & behavioral strategy – but also defense plans

### ACTIVISTS HAVE WEB USE IN BALANCE

"Technology is a tool that can be used strategically to enhance grassroots organizing & outreach efforts related to political campaigns & public policy issues. It is most effective as a supplement to – not a substitute for – traditional organizing & outreach techniques. So don't stop organizing rallies, house parties & press conferences, keep making those phone calls, and continue building your membership through direct mail &/or telemarketing." – from *The Virtual Activist*

### THE VIRTUAL ACTIVIST PROVIDES TRAINING ON SUCH TOPICS AS:

1. Using e-mail for **outreach, organizing & advocacy**
2. Cyberspace **networking**
3. Techniques for using **e-mail lists**
4. Tips for effective **on-line media**: A NetAction mini-trainer
5. On-line media advocacy **resources**
6. **Membership & fundraising** via Web & e-mail
7. Privacy, copyright & censorship **information**
8. **Links** to additional resources



## HANDBOOK FOR ACTION GOES IN DEPTH ON A SINGLE ISSUE (BIOTECH)

Its value to practitioners is both as a sample of how well organized present-day social activists are & how they're using the Web to motivate the like-minded. Site offers:

1. **Inclusion:** a) making a commitment; b) ground rules; c) the pledge regarding safety, non-violence, openness & accepting the consequences; d) forming an "affinity group"; e) continuing the resistance
2. **Info:** a) how to pull up genetically modified plants & contain them; b) effects & implications of genetically modified plants; c) risks to the environment & biodiversity; d) crop identification, including illustrations
3. **Tools:** a) sample materials to be used including letters to farmers, biotech companies & the police; b) ready-to-use artwork for posters & brochures; c) personal statements from activists; d) guide to "exploiting the media" from crafting & distributing a news release to appearing on a tv talk show. "While their editors & proprietors may be total bastards, a lot of journalists are not bad people, just weak & cowardly."

"Broad distribution of both the information & the tools means no one can control the communications process. Recipients are free to undertake any communications activity at any time," Irvine says. Once this uncontrollable communications process has been unleashed, it cannot be corralled. "It's a matter of trust. Do pr folks have it?" ([www.netaction.org](http://www.netaction.org), [www.eublicrelations.org](http://www.eublicrelations.org), or [www.gn.apc.org](http://www.gn.apc.org))

## PR FIRM PARTNERS WITH TECH COMPANY, LAWYERS TO NIP ON-LINE ATTACKS IN THE BUD; SOME STRATEGY TIPS

According to crisis communications firm Nichols Dezenhall (DC), an Internet rumor is not an innocent piece of on-line gossip. It's a marketplace assault, with a rival player often masterminding the attack.

- "We have found that there is almost always an industry association," Steven Schlein, vp & gm of ND's LA office, told prr. A typical scenario: his firm recently tracked the origin of bogus on-line claims that a client's product was toxic. "We found that the woman who was spreading the rumors was actually working for a competitor"

The proliferation of on-line aggression – not only in chat room rumors but by e-mail smear campaigns, attack Web sites & Web-based activist mobilizations – prompted ND to develop ND COP (Nichols Dezenhall Cyber Operations Program) which aims to stop on-line attacks. "We're a crisis communications firm that specializes in attacks – on-line attacks are a natural outgrowth of our business." ND COP involves partnership with:

1. **A law firm** that specializes in communications & trade law. The partnership not only brings with it a heavy hand (the threat of lawsuits) but also provides expertise about communication law, defamation laws, laws against slander, the differences in laws governing attacks against branded products & services vs. those that are not branded
2. **NetCentric, an IT firm** that can track people on-line. While there are stealth surfing devices in development, other technologies are racing to outsmart them. "It's an arms race, from a technology point of view, but NetCentric is ahead of the game." Schlein says they've been 100% successful in

tracking down the rumor mongers, from chat rooms to their on-line accounts to their street addresses

## COUNTERING ATTACKS THE MATURE WAY

"Effective communication is vital, but is only one part of the solution.

- A. "What's needed is a rapid response plan to diffuse the attack & create risk for the attacker." Schlein says the loss of anonymity can stop an individual attacker in his/her tracks. "Just because you're typing the rumors from your home computer somewhere in the Midwest doesn't mean you're anonymous." Individuals are rattled to find out they are exposed
- B. **Another tactic is to debunk the rumors** by going to the appropriate scientific groups & using the appropriate media. "More often than not these rumors are stopped in the trade media, so they don't make it to the mainstream media"
- C. **Finally, there is the threat of lawsuits**, tho Schlein says it hasn't come to that yet. "The angry lawyer letter usually stops this activity in its tracks"

**One thing ND won't do is smear the competitor via an on-line counter campaign.** "Our clients usually want to remain confidential." Besides, he says, neither his firm nor its clients want to engage in anything that can be perceived as "pranksterish" behavior. That's what the on-line attackers are doing.

## "THE TYPE OF THING WE'RE TRYING TO STOP"

One example of a rumor run rampant is the Tommy

Hilfiger case. According to chat room lore, designer Hilfiger made racist comments about black people on the Oprah Show. Schlein says it took only a day or two before the rumor was reported on the national news. As it turns out, Hilfiger had never even been on Oprah. "We'd have put a stop to it, tracked it down before it broke on the news. I wouldn't be surprised if it was started by a competitor." (More from Schlein at 310/772-0629 or [www.nichols-dezenhall.com](http://www.nichols-dezenhall.com))

## AT LAST: AN AWARD FOR GREAT PLANS EVEN IF NOT EXECUTED

Phila/PRSA's "Big Idea" Award is for pr campaigns that may or may not have made it off the ground. "We're really trying to show the ingenuity of the practitioner, regardless of whether or not the programs are launched," Rick Alcantara, Delaware Valley Com'ns Leadership Council told prr. Alcantara, who heads up NJ-based Tara Com'ns, notes that many times a pr program may sit on the drawing board because of budget constraints & such – even tho it is exemplary & others can learn from it.

Category is part of the Pepperpot Awards, so named because the winners use a little of this and a little of that to make for a full-bodied program.

Year 2000 winner is Anne Klein Assocs (Marlton, NJ), creators of the "Street of Stars" campaign. "We wanted to develop a program that would bring positive attention to our client (a major insurance company in Phila) & to the city," svp Nels Fellman told prr. Since the client was a major sports sponsor, AK came up with a fitting concept – decorate one of the city's thoroughfares with plaques featuring famous Philly sports figures. People would be able to vote on the athlete of honor & there would be a great fanfare, with the athlete attending the unveiling. AK was ready to go, with street permits in hand & enthusiastic support of the local media. "It would have been a great tourist