

RADIO NEWS RELEASES MAKE A COMEBACK AS SCALED-BACK NEWS ROOMS LOOK FOR FILLER

A slumping economy is good news for radio news releases. Once relegated to the junk bin of many a newsroom, they're now receiving more play as harried understaffed bureaus welcome the help. "They're telling us they're being forced to do more with less," says Jack Trammell, pres, VNR-1 Communications (Dallas). "As long as they're well produced and stories don't appear to be blatant commercials, newsrooms are inclined to use them."

Trammell's group recently polled radio newsrooms. They contacted 328 and received 132 responses, a response rate of 40+ percent. He found that 83% of the newsrooms use RNRs and 34% report the tape gives them ideas for local stories. The editors look for regional interest (34%), health (23%), and financial news (11%). They also like tech stories, children's issues, politics, seasonal stories, agriculture and local interest issues.

TIPS FOR ENSURING PLAY

1. **Include info sources** so radio can call them, ask their own questions and spin RNR into a viable news story
2. **Make it as newsy as possible** – commercials will be thrown out
3. **No mistakes** – bad grammar and sloppy writing will send your tape to the trash can
4. **Track the issues.** Listen to what stations are talking about and keep your RNRs topical. "So long as the topics can reach out and grab the listeners, the RNRs will be useful to the newsroom." Producers look for ways stories can be localized, so follow issues of the day

RNRs went through a blue period when fully-staffed news rooms saw no reason to accept a tape that might be one-sided, when a staffer could get the story and make it unbiased. Cutbacks, however, are earning well-produced RNRs more air time. "For 83% of the newsrooms to admit they are using RNR material is telling. They are thirsty for info and at the same time they are starved for manpower."

(For more info, contact Trammell at 817/794-0555. For info on VNR study, see [pr 3/5](#))

ITEM OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Poll Results Show Practitioners Happy With Jobs.** No wonder practitioners tend to be sunny & optimistic people ([pr 1/16/89](#)) – compared to, say, journalists who are downbeat, depressed, underpaid and often isolated in their jobs. According to a survey from Harris/Impulse Research, pr staffers feel challenged, accomplished, and rewarded, and they have time for a personal life. Researchers polled 3,162 counselors and found that 25% report being "very satisfied," 40% "satisfied," and 20% say they're "somewhat satisfied" with their jobs. Over 3/4s (77%) say they're "fairly to very well rewarded" – 8% say they're "very well rewarded," 31% say "well rewarded," and 38% "fairly rewarded." They were unanimous (98%) in saying they feel "challenged and earn a personal sense of accomplishment" and over 9 out of 10 (96%) report a "good working relationship with supervisors." A whopping 94% say they have sufficient time for personal or family life and 91% feel appreciated.

FORD PRESENTS THE RELATIONSHIP MODEL

Without mentioning public relations even once, the Ford Motor Company's 2000 Annual Report contains textbook demonstrations of the value of corporate reputation and relationships: "the process of building deep and lasting bonds between our company and customers, suppliers, dealers, society, investors and our employees – every single one of our principal stakeholder groups."

- In his Chairman's Message, William Clay Ford, Jr. identifies the ingredients of the corporate reputation: "Ford Motor Company is the umbrella for all of our brands. As such, it must stand for the highest ideals and universally shared values of people around the world. It also must stand for leadership in corporate citizenship."
- President and CEO Jacques Nasser's report states what a customer relationship signifies: "when you view your business from the customer's perspective, you shift from a 'transaction' mentality to a 'relationship' headset – from merely selling a vehicle to providing an ongoing stream of automotive-related products and services that suit a customer's needs over a lifetime."

FIRESTONE TIRE RECALL PRODUCES TRANSFORMATION IN CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Chairman Ford explicitly refers to the challenge of the Firestone tire recall and, presciently, uses the *regret* word: "The Firestone tire recall reinforced everything we believe about the critical importance of being responsive and responsible in everything we do as a corporation. There is nothing more important to us than the safety and trust of our customers. I deeply regret the anguish this tragic situation caused, and the anxiety felt by our customers."

Nasser credits Ford's team of dealers, suppliers and union partners for their extraordinary effort in identifying the bad tires and replacing them "months ahead of the original Firestone schedule." "We are transforming ourselves into a consumer-focused team [by]... fundamentally changing our attitudes, behaviors and culture so that we put the customer first in everything we do."

SOCIETY AND EMPLOYEES RECOGNIZED TOO

People are not just looking for high quality in the companies with which they do business. They look beyond "to the character of the companies providing their goods and services and make decisions based in large part on how responsible those companies are." Ford refers to its donation of over \$30 million to higher education institutions around the world and its long relationship with Conservation International, initially to help save the Brazilian rain forests and now to promote sound environmental thinking worldwide.

Recognizing that "people power" is crucial to its mission, Ford states it is opening 30 Family Service and Learning Centers around the US which combine important services such as childcare and educational resources. The centers also provide resources and employee volunteers to the community. The company specifically refers to the United Auto Workers and the Canadian Auto Workers as



historically providing the “greatest tie to the largest numbers of its employees.” Ford also mentions its innovation of “providing employees with computers, printers and access to the World Wide Web” at a cost to employees of only \$5 US a month (pr 2/21/00).

On Ford’s list of company officers is Jason H. Vines, vp com’ns. In January, he announced a global reorganization of his staff, which includes the key post of exec dir of trustmark communications and global product development, headed by Ken Zino. (For more info on trustmarks, see purview 4/30)

JOURNALISTS CONTINUE TREND OF USING THE INTERNET

The Seventh Annual Middleberg/Ross Survey of the Media reports that 98% of journalists in the US went online in 2000 at least daily to check e-mail. Most commonly journalists have two e-mail addresses and 12% say they have as many as six or more. E-mail has caught up with the phone as the preferred method for interviewing news sources. Knowing the favored e-mail address of a journalist has become a measure of a media relations professional’s proficiency.

Some other uses of the Internet: (% of respondents)

- Article research: 92%
- Finding new sources/expert: 76%
- Finding press releases: 73%
- Participating in dialogues with readers: 70%

Digital photography is edging out slides and photos: 61% of newspaper and 46% of magazine respondents prefer it.

Journalists in all media agree that their jobs have been made easier by the Internet and that the quality of their work has improved. [For a differing perspective, see pr 9/4/00]

IF BUSINESS WERE TO GOVERN, WHO WOULD BE COMMANDER IN CHIEF? STUDY REFLECTS PUBLIC’S PRIORITIES IN LEADERSHIP

Privatize the federal government? If so, who should be in charge? That was the question Brouillard Communications (NYC) sought to find out from a swath of the American public. Brouillard teamed with researchers Bayer Consulting to find out which company people would trust with the keys to the Oval Office. Researchers say the responses, based on interviews with 1,000 randomly chosen adults, provide insights into what people look for in terms of leadership. “This study shows which businesses Americans would most and least trust if their lives depended on it,” says pres Bill Lyddan. “It’s particularly relevant now that we have our first MBA president.... If the White House intends to emulate the private sector, our study provides a guide.”

GATES LEADS, BUT EVEN SUPPORTERS HAVE RESERVATIONS

1. **Performance first.** Most Americans (28%) would want Microsoft in charge, citing the company’s strong performance (15%) as the basis for their confidence. But Brouillard warns that many regard Bill Gates the same way they think of the “last Bill in the White House” – highly effective and innovative, but lacking character and prone to poor behavior. Still, half of the Microsoft voters cited the company’s corporate character as a strong point, pointing to its creativity and innovation.

2. **Star power earns points.** Behind Microsoft, IBM finished a distant 2nd; Lyddan says the celebrity factor was in play. Gates’s high profile earned the company lots of points and many respondents who chose Microsoft specified Bill Gates as a prime reason. “Microsoft, for all its faults, is perceived as a highly effective, can-do company. Altho brand recognition, size and longevity matter, most Americans seem to be asking, ‘What have you done for me lately?’” On that basis, Microsoft wins over IBM.
3. **Bridgestone/Firestone came in 3rd.** People who booed the company cited performance reasons – an obvious reference to the tire recall.

THE FLIP SIDE: MICROSOFT ALSO GETS “MOST THUMBS DOWN”

Ironically, while Microsoft was voted most able to run the government, it was also chosen as the one voters would least like to see running the country.

Reasons: 2/3rds voted attitude/character reasons for not wanting the software giant in, saying Microsoft is greedy and unfair; 20% are offended by its “monopolistic practices”; 13% say Microsoft is only interested in profit; 10% say it’s too big. Of the people who voted against Microsoft, 14% say they dislike the company’s ethics. So while it won a plurality, it also lost by another big piece of the pie. “It loses points for bad behavior.” Again, interesting parallel to Bill Clinton – popular for effectiveness but generating strong negatives because of conduct. “The anti-trust case is to Microsoft what the Monica Lewinsky scandal was to Clinton.”

Question to ponder: Are ethics starting to fade from the radar screen? Of the group that voted in Bill Gates and Microsoft, 0% say ethics should be a consideration in voting in leadership. Performance seems to be the primary driver.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHAPERS

More people under age 35 voted in favor of Microsoft, as did more on the West Coast. Other factors:

- a. **Gender.** Men heavily favor performance-related criteria, while women give character more weight
- b. **Income.** Household incomes under \$100K are more likely to focus on performance, while wealthier Americans favor character-related reasons
- c. **Education.** College training lends itself to character-related criteria

PARALLEL STUDY IN THE UK FAVORS VIRGIN ATLANTIC

Virgin Atlantic came out ahead in a similar study conducted by Brouillard UK. There, 1,007 adults ages 16+ were sampled. Virgin was far and away the winner for reasons similar to the US-based results: strong performance and celebrity factor, i.e., huge popularity of CEO Sir Richard Branson. Railtrack was voted least favorite, with poor performance cited as the chief reason. Lyddan suggests the wide gulf between Virgin and runners-up means UK is fertile field for bold new entrants who want to make big headway. (For more information, contact Brouillard at 212/721-7468)