ENGINEERING A BEHAVIORAL PLAN TO INTEGRATE WEB SITE INTO DAILY ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY

"To make most effective use of what technology has to offer, consider wisely the purpose for which your web site will be used, and **develop an effective strategy and *behavioral plan* for integrating your site into daily organizational activity**. Those who do will find themselves at the leading edge of business success," writes Robert Anthony in *Webnotes*, a monthly newsletter from Online Composition and Design Technology.

But few web sites are effective catalysts for public relations plans, notes Anthony. He offers these **9 ways to effectively integrate your web site into an overall pr program**:

1. Use **customer testimonies** to highlight positive customer experiences with your service or product. Don't forget to use photos of the customer, just make sure to obtain a privacy release before you do.
2. Present **product portfolios** for browsing or online shopping.
3. Publish a **FAQ or "About Us" page** on your organization's web site that tells people what the site is all about. Stay away from overt commercial messages and make sure your "About Us" page is exactly that, offering a brief overview only with contact e-mail addresses.
4. Include a **monthly newsletter** to clients and customers published on your web page or a text version distributed via e-mail in text or html format with links to your primary web site.
5. Offer **live online chat** for customer service, client or consumer concerns.
6. Publish **press releases** on your web site for media relations and for other info seekers.
7. Offer a **virtual tour** of your office or manufacturing facility on a CD-ROM or your primary web site that links to broader information about your organization, product or service.
8. Include **employee communications** on a web-based employee forum or Intranet as one facet of building employee relationships.
9. Offer web-based **training sites** for employees, clients, stakeholders, et al.

(More info from OCD Technologies of East Lansing, Michigan, www.ocdt.net)

ITEM OF INTEREST TO PROFESSIONALS

¶ **Involvement Builds Brands**. Worldwide vote to pick newest M&M color – purple, pink or aqua – will begin March 6. It's the first *global* promotion in the M&M brand's 61-year history. 78 countries will be involved ranging from Australia to the Ukraine – including some countries where no citizen has previously had the opportunity to cast a governmental vote. Voters will log on to www.mms.com, which will be accessible in more than 15 languages, or vote through mail, phone or at kiosks placed in select locations. Winning color will be announced at a gala event in NYC in June. A nationwide vote in 1995 determined the last color change – blue, which replaced tan – chosen by 10 million Americans.

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pr reporter

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CONSULTING EXECS DEVISE BEST PRACTICES WHEN RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES – APPLICABLE FOR ALL

Every organization should have a crisis and emergency plan, but pr firms and other consultancies face special challenges. "A lot of consultants work on the client site," Maria Newport, Newport O'Connor (NYC) told prr. At the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, many consultants were on site helping clients. **Because consultants travel so much, accounting for everybody is a major concern.**

The Association of Management Consulting Firms (AMCF) has issued a **best practices guide that outlines protocols for dealing with emergency situations**. Smart practitioners have long warned clients about what to do when faced with hazardous material incidents, explosions, downsizing, scandals, etc. – but now add to the list terror attacks, both physical and biological, and technical threats such as viruses and hacking. Newport compiled the guide based on remarks made by key security and international execs at an AMCF roundtable in November. Their ideas, combined with FEMA guidelines, comprise the best practices for consulting firms.

WHY A GUIDE FOR CONSULTANTS?

Newport says that on September 11th, many companies wasted time establishing who was on staff at the time, where they were, whether or not they could be located. "The lines of communication have to be kept open within the organization; it's important to be able to keep track of staff and know how to find them and their families." Firms have legal, statuary and moral obligation to ensure a safe work environment, in and outside the office. "Diary and scheduling systems should be set up, and/or travel services that provide tracking info used (e.g., American Express, International SOS) to enable communication."

The consultant is also responsible. "They tend to be autonomous and independent." And, just as management should have procedures in place for locating its people, consultants themselves need to be vigilant about planning ahead and making their whereabouts known. Other special concerns for practitioners and consultants:

1. **Human Capital**: This is the greatest asset of a professional services firm, so **ensuring safety of staff is the top priority**. Current and regularly updated employee contact lists are vital. Consistent, frequent and open communication is paramount during the emergency.
2. **Intellectual Capital**: Accumulated data by the firm should be documented and stored. Plans should be in place to protect and to recover this data. Know the value of the info. Back up digital records, develop retention schedules, store data off site or on a sustainable "mirroring" system.
3. **Info tech Systems**: Risk assessment of all systems must be conducted and a robust self-audit system established, with secure operations and technologies. "Firms need to ensure that crisis response plans and processes exist; contingency plans for hardware and software, network connectivity, data storage and database back up are in place and third party agreements are formed

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so that continuity of services is ensured." **Take a lesson from how financial firms prepared for Y2K: "implement safeguards ahead of time!"**

MAINTAINING ORDER INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

- **Management**: Best practices say to ensure that the chain of command is in place. "You can assume that not every key person will be readily available or at the office after an emergency. **Ensure recovery decisions can be made without undue delay**." Also, a) have in place a chain of command; b) maintain and clarify lines of successions for key personnel; c) have a plan to move to alternate headquarters. First, however, consult legal for corporate bylaws, etc.

- **Employees**: The company should a) urge them to consider how to communicate with families in case they are separated or injured in an emergency; b) arrange for out of town contact for them and for all family members to call in an emergency; c) designate a place to meet family members in case employee cannot get home; d) consider flexibility, cash advances, daycare, crisis counseling, etc. for employees.

- **Communities**: **These relationships determine an organization's ability to return to normal operations**: a) maintain dialogue and relationships with community leaders, emergency services, government agencies, utilities, and key organizations such as hospitals, neighborhood groups, emergency planning personnel, appointed and elected leaders; b) look for common interests and involve fire, police departments in emergency drills and exercises; c) establish mutual aid agreements with local response agencies and businesses – these could include shelter space, emergency storage, medical support, supplies; d) get to know neighboring businesses and negotiate in advance exchange of services during crises – "they may, for example, allow use of their property to account for personnel after an evacuation, or set up temporary business services. Consultancies could consider assisting with shelter, storage, feeding facilities, clothing, funding, transportation, etc.

Guide also includes info on how to establish a planning team, what to do about recovery and restoration, how to resume operations, as well as logistical and administrative plans. (For more information or to order guide, contact AMCF, 380 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1700, NYC 10168 or e-mail info@amcf.org.)

THE COMING PR BOOM IN CHINA; HOW PR PRACTICES DIFFER

The practice of public relations in China is expected to boom, according to the China International Public Relations Association (CIPRA). It cites several factors: 1) China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), 2) growing investment in China by multinational companies, 3)greater awareness by Chinese enterprises of the importance of public relations, 4) the improvement of public relations services, and 5) a more regulated public relations market.

This information is reported by Chun Ju Hung, a Ph.D. student at the U of Maryland, who spent six weeks in China last summer collecting data for her dissertation on how multinational companies manage their relationships in China. (She now teaches public relations at Hong Kong Baptist University.) She found that opportunities in pr are greatest in IT, health communication and consumer products. 90% of the companies she surveyed have clients from IT. The three major areas for IT clients are computer and related products, telecommunication products and the Internet.

HOW CHINESE PR PRACTICES DIFFER

- ***Quan-xi***: Public relations practitioners in China regard pr as a form of developing *quan-xi* – personal relationships – thus building on the unique characteristic in Chinese culture of **maintaining harmonious relationships with people**. This form of pr is often associated with an early stage in the development of public relations called guest relations. This concept of pr was reinforced in an early 1990s popular tv series, says Hung, which showed how young women hosted guests at some hotels. The traditional view of *quan-xi*, as a form of facilitating business, therefore, has some negative connotations and ethics has become a major pr concern.

- **Government**: Hung reports another characteristic – the **emphasis in pr on promoting good relationships with local governments**. The idea that government is the chief mechanism to foster societal development has been inherited from the dynasty era. Today, both multinationals and local organizations often consider government the most important public.

- **Media Relations**: A common question for Chinese practitioners is, "Do you pay the media?" Many do, as a way to obtain favorable publicity for their clients. Ni Chen, who has written about the development of pr in China and is now teaching at Hong Kong Baptist University, states that the **media are highly controlled by the Chinese government and its ruling party**. Also, few practitioners have had media experience before entering public relations.

> APCO Asia, with offices in 7 Asian cities, is the largest public affairs firm in the region. Margery Kraus, CEO of APCO Worldwide (DC), offers prr these insights based on her experience in China:
>
> - **Work by the ethical standards** you want to uphold long term for the profession and for your client.
> - **Don't pay journalists**. Though it's done and might help you in the short term, it won't in the long term.
> - The press is owned by the government. The more you can **understand how your work fits within the framework there, the better coverage you'll get**.
> - **Reputation really matters**. Just because your firm may be well known elsewhere, doesn't mean you'll be well known in China. Don't presume; find a way to demonstrate that by the way you conduct your pr.
> - **Corporate social responsibility is a big factor in reputation building**. Take on projects that will have societal benefits, that allow you to do good and do well at the same time.

KEY LOCATIONS OF PR PRACTICE

A survey of pr firms conducted by CIPRA in 2000 shows that 80% of public relations firms are located in Beijing (China's capital, where most important government offices are located), Shanghai, and Guangzhou (Shengzhou). Multinationals focus their practices in these cities as do local firms, which, however, also have offices in Chiengtu (a city in the Sichuan province) and Xian (the capital of the Shanxi province).
