

Chapter 14:

COMMUNICATION TACTICS

With research, strategy, issues anticipation accomplished, we then must become tacticians and communicate with stakeholders. Pat urged that we look at the behaviors of the stakeholders and communicate strategically to them. Somehow we must “cut through the clutter” of overcommunication and reach our target in a way that will stimulate a desired behavior.

“People want to be served, not sold – **involved, not told.**”
– Pat Jackson, December 1995

FIRST EVER WORD-OF-MOUTH RESEARCH STUDY FINDS UNMOLLIFIED COMPLAINANTS TELL 10 OTHERS, QUIT OR CUT BACK ON COMPANY'S PRODUCTS

Though everyone "knows" word-of-mouth is a powerful medium, no publicly available research on the phenomenon existed – until "Measuring the Grapevine Consumer Response in Word-Of-Mouth." Done last year for Coca-Cola by Technical Assistance Research Programs (D.C.), study found 12% of complainers told over 20 people about the response from the company. Also:

1. **Consumers who felt their complaints weren't satisfactorily resolved** told a median of 9 to 10 people about their negative experience. 30% of them said they no longer buy the company's products, another 45% said they now buy them less frequently.
2. **Inquirers who felt their queries weren't satisfactorily answered** told a median of 4 to 5 people about that negative experience. 12.5% no longer buy the company's products, another 12.5% cut back on purchases.
3. **Complainants whose gripes were resolved** told 4 to 5 friends or associates about their positive experience – and 10% now buy more products from Coca-Cola.
4. 70% of **inquirers whose questions were satisfactorily answered** say they now buy more.

TARP vp Marc Grainer told pr the study definitively illustrates "the marketing pitfalls of being unresponsive to consumer complaints and inquiries." It shows consumer response systems can become "high performance profit centers." He said the study demonstrates "brand loyalty can be reinforced by satisfactorily responding, or severely eroded when consumers are not satisfied with responses to complaints or inquiries."

TARP's search of the literature found only two previous items – one an unintelligible experimental study from the Aug 1967 Journal of Marketing Research, the other is William White's Fortune article of Nov. 1950 entitled "The Web of Word of Mouth," which contained no research, just his gut feeling.

BUT INFORMAL RESEARCH BY WORLD'S CHAMP SALESMAN OFFERS SOME GUIDELINES

greatest retail salesman, Girard sold over 13,000 cars and trucks in 15 years. His rule: "**When you turn somebody off for whatever reason, remember, you turn off 250 people,**" he says in his book, *How to Sell Anything to Anybody*. Girard got this figure by asking undertakers how they know the number of cards to print for funerals. He learned the average person normally has 250 callers at the funeral home or attending the service. Girard thus reasoned that the average person has 250 others he sees regularly enough to influence through word-of-mouth.

Joe Girard's "undertaker's law" is the closest thing practitioners have had to a rule for measuring the ripple effect of grapevine communication. Listed in the *Guinness Book Of Records* as the world's

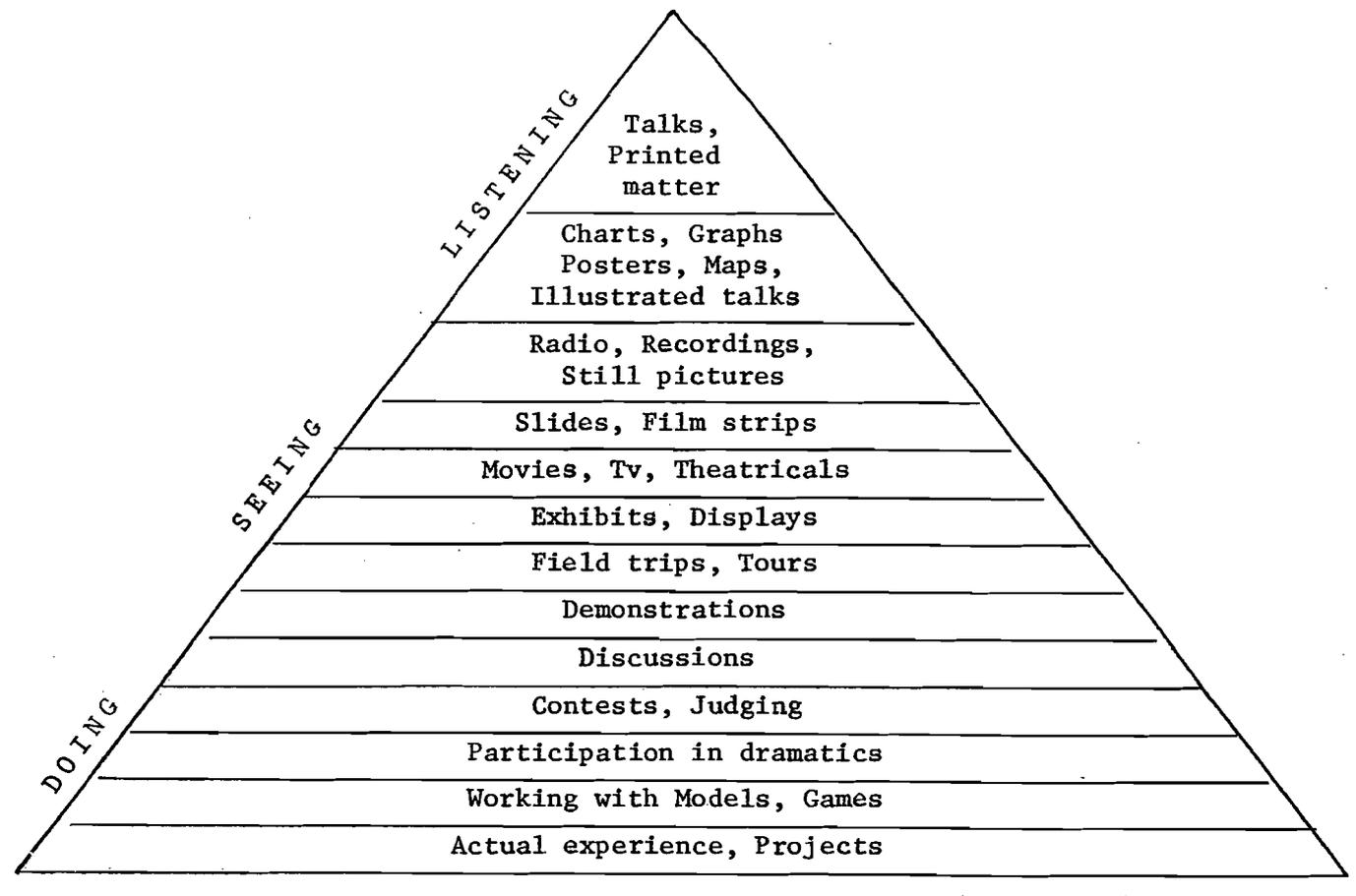
Vol.25 No.7
February 15, 1982

SUBSTITUTE PROJECTS, HAND-ON EXPERIENCE FOR COMMUNICATIONS IF YOU WANT TO EDUCATE PUBLICS, ADVISES EXTENSION SERVICE

History's most effective public education organization is one title given Cooperative Extension Service. Founded by federal legislation in 1914 as an outreach arm of the land grant colleges, CES is credited with the unparalleled success of American agriculture. 50 years ago one farm fed itself and a handful of others. Now US farms can feed the world. CES had to train farmers – not the easiest audience – in use of constantly evolving science and equipment...at the same time farm population was declining, demands of production escalating.

CES is so deeply immersed in effective information transfer that it sponsored basic research on diffusion process. Effectiveness of learning increases, according to its experience, as one moves from listening to seeing to doing. Speakers teach the least!

People remember: 20% of what they are told; 30% of what they see; 50% of what they see and hear; 70% of what they say; 90% of what they do. Forget your news releases and speaker's bureaus; design projects that involve audiences!



Vol.25 No.7
February 15, 1982

WHAT HAPPENS TO LANGUAGE IN ERA OF COMPUTERVISION?
"PROPER" GRAMMAR, LOGICAL CASE VS. MEANING, MEMORABILITY

Computers talk. Television substitutes oral for written language as the norm for most of the population. Johnny can't read. Many of us speak Spanglish. How important are the details of language at such a time?

Judging from the materials they produce, many practitioners hold to the belief that conventional, "proper" language is a priority. In their hierarchy it comes right after building a logical case, step-by-step. Others argue that language is growing & changing continually, that such sins as dangling participles & group nouns followed by singular verbs are not important if the meaning comes across. Many old-fashioned but "correct" forms of usage are cumbersome, they note -- e.g. "about which I will tell you" as opposed to "which I'll tell you about."

In today's Babel there is much to be said for giving precedence to
1) meaningfulness, messages that have meaning to the audience in its (not your) terms; and 2) memorability, so the idea sticks. Here are some memorable examples from recent press reports:

¶ "As soon as rocks start flying, we are no longer concerned with freedom of speech." (State police commander at Ku Klux Klan rally)

¶ "We use manual clocks; they get CB radios. We use radar; they get radar. Now we have enlisted the help of aircraft. Don't be surprised to see surface-to-air missiles on sale at Radio Shack!" (Highway safety article by patrolman)

¶ "I never use the words Democrats and Republicans. It's liberals and Americans." (Interior Sec'y James Watt in speech to farmers)

It may be worth noting that such messages often come from those whose work involves action, not intellectualizing -- like the policeman quoted above. Their use of words is ingenuous -- and pungent. The question is, how can practitioners capture such bon mots to put into print or into the mouths of CEOs? Tape recording conversations with the folks "out there" is one way. Go into the plant or office and ask employees to express themselves on the issues. George Orwell offers another method (see box).

ORWELL'S FOUR-STEP

In The Language & Symbols of Politics, George Orwell proposed this method for creating messages that truly communicate:

1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will express it?
3. What image or idiom will make it clearer?
4. Is this image fresh enough?

Alden Wood, The Typochondriac, thinks Orwell's system charts the fine line between traditional language and effective expression.

ANYONE WHO WONDERS WHETHER PUBLIC RELATIONS PHILOSOPHY PAYS OFF
NEED ONLY READ JOHNSON & JOHNSON'S CENTENNIAL HISTORY:
PATHBREAKING POLICIES AND 11.6% COMPOUNDED ANNUAL GROWTH FOR 100 YEARS!

For its handling of the two Tylenol crises, J&J is universally praised. Now vp-pr Larry Foster's "A Company That Cares" shows how the corporate philosophy that overcame those stunning blows has been working in equally striking fashion for decades. This case study demonstrates the perpetual value of building public relationships:

1. Improving human relationships in the workplace. When poor working conditions & wages were the rule, J&J in 1906 began offering a variety of employee benefits. Creative problem-solving was the approach, so that a French chef was hired to prepare a midnight meal for the third shift in order to make working those hours more acceptable. During the Depression, ways were found to spread worktime & wage cuts across the employee & managerial force -- so no jobs were lost!

2. Using buildings as internal & external pr tools. In a day when factories were generally ugly, unsafe & built for expedience, CEO Robert Wood Johnson began a "factories can be beautiful" campaign. What prompted him were the poor conditions he noted in some workplaces. Other companies thought him crazy -- but J&J reaped better production as well as employee & community accolades. The buildings cost more but in the long run were far less expensive because of these indirect benefits.

"We do not think of corporations as being caring, but they can be. They can also reflect many of the other emotions we reserve for people, which is not so surprising, for in a larger sense corporations are a collection of people who work together."

-- from Foster's Introduction

3. Avoiding micromanagement thru decentralization is another way J&J respects the dignity of managers & workers. Each of its 55 companies has its own identity, name & mission -- even tho spread across 160 countries & 77,000 employees. What links them is concentration in a single industry, healthcare, and the J&J policy umbrella.

4. Publishing educational materials, not just promos, built the business. "Modern Methods of Antiseptic Wound Treatment" (1888), with suggestions by "eminent surgeons," was a scientific document and a sales catalog. The magazine "Red Cross Messenger" (that symbol has been used by J&J since 1895 by contract with the Red Cross) united pharmacists behind the idea they were "educators who rank with the clergyman, the teacher & the physician." There were many others.

5. Such enlightened self-interest led J&J to donate quantities of medical supplies to disaster areas, beginning with the Galveston hurricane (1900) and

San Francisco earthquake (1906). Dealer invoices under \$100 -- a lot of money then -- were cancelled & the company replaced free any damaged supplies (a la Tylenol).

6. These & other pathfinding actions culminated in the now-famous Credo of 1943. In an early version, R.W. Johnson said: "Industry only has the right to succeed where it performs a real economic service and is a true social asset. Such permanent (sec) success is possible only thru the application of an industrial philosophy of enlightened self-interest." This means realizing that "service to customers comes first, service to employees & management second, and service to stockholders last." Later service to community was added as the third responsibility.

The strategy seems to have been one of taking the lead -- by thinking first of the company's publics.

This has built trust & gained prominence. But most of all it demonstrates that putting the needs & values of stakeholders first turns out to be hard-headed pragmatism. Public relations is not "soft."

"Institutions, both public & private, exist because the people want them, believe in them, or at least are willing to tolerate them. The day has passed when business was a private matter -- if it ever really was. In a business society, every act of business has social consequences & may arouse public interest. Every time business hires, builds, sells or buys, it is acting for the people as well as for itself, and it must be prepared to accept full responsibility for its acts."

-- Robert Wood Johnson
in the 1940s

Vol.31 No.30
August 1, 1988

**NAME SURVEY FINDS MEANINGLESS A BARRIER:
"PEOPLE PREFER NAMES THEY CAN UNDERSTAND."
DOES THIS APPLY TO SLOGANS AND THEMES AS WELL?**

What we call something – the semantics used to frame an issue, the spin on a news story, a job title – often has more influence on acceptance or rejection than other factors. LandorResearch produced a survey evaluating the effectiveness of 672 corporate and brand names. What are the implications for practitioners?

Survey was based on 1,000 consumer interviews. Though rival "corporate identify firms" argue many names are not designed to appeal to the general public, Stewart Owen of LandorResearch (that's right: no space between the words) contends, "All audiences prefer names they can understand, **whether it's the investment community or the general population. In this study, people are reacting against meaninglessness. They prefer meaning.**"

Among names with the highest image power are Coca Cola, Levis, Sears, AT&T. Lowest ranking – Exide, Gaggenau, Bang & Olufsen, Klipsch. Note three of the low rated names sound clearly foreign, another form of meaninglessness

HOW ONE HIGHLY VISIBLE CATEGORY WAS RATED: BEVERAGE BRANDS

Of 672 names:	Image Power Rank	Share of Mind Rank	Esteem Rank
Coca Cola	1	1	1
Pepsi Cola	3	5	8
Budweiser	20	12	69
7 Up	21	29	30
Minute Maid	33	70	27
Dr. Pepper	89	56	188
Jack Daniels	93	146	74
Hawaiian Punch	109	118	125
Kool-Aid	130	57	329
V-8	132	103	205
Michelob	161	140	208
Coors	183	109	319
Canada Dry	184	137	264
Bartyles & James	188	198	181
Sprite	218	158	334
California Cooler	219	195	256
Lowenbrau	253	226	321
Busch	268	283	236
Heineken	270	302	207
Miller	298	274	344

With major organization name changes occurring in record numbers – 930 in the first half of 1988 alone, according to Anspach Grossman Portugal (NYC) – the doubt about meaningless names is important. Many are ditching the homespun sound for something more hi-tech and galactic (American Hardware Supply Co. to Servistar; International Harvester to Navistar) while a few are leaving cold, pre-fab names for folksy-sounding ones that evoke images from a Grant Wood painting (Consolidated Foods to Sara Lee).

“Unum,” new name for Union Mutual Insurance, bombed near the bottom of the survey as did “Allegis,” formerly United Airlines. Both were the brainchildren of Lippincott & Margulies (NYC). Others also fared poorly, including Anspach, whose “Unisys” (ex-Sperry & Burroughs) was ranked low.

WHO'S THE TARGET?

Its rivals are critical of the fact Landor surveyed the general public, which often is not a factor when corporations decide to re-christen themselves. The intent is to appeal to certain audiences, not to the average consumer. Furthermore, many don't change their names to sound more aesthetically pleasing but because of necessity (divestitures, spin offs, leveraged buy outs, etc.).

Even so, Clive Chajet of Lippincott & Margulies “ends up telling half his clients to stick with their original monikers,” according to *US News & World Report*.

THE REAL QUESTIONS

1. **Does the semantics employed add anything** to the “pictures in the heads” of the target public? If not – as in changing U.S. Steel to USX – why pay huge fees to these firms? Or was USX aiming to become invisible because of its problems? Will “the children’s agenda” attract political support that daycare and education couldn’t?
 2. **How soon will “the beauty of the familiar” take over?** Once a word or phrase becomes by definition a cliché, a handle, much of its denotative meaning is lost anyway. Maximum value from new wording is derived during its awareness period. Once it becomes well known, familiarity does breed dullness if not contempt.
 3. **What is the role of practitioners here?** While consultants’ skills in mnemonics or graphic psychology may be useful, pr staff is responsible for the whole range of reactions to the organization. Unless practitioners are in control of these naming/semantic projects, One Clear Voice can easily be sacrificed to some glib salesman with a classy dog and pony of snazzy graphics. That is not what it’s all about.
 4. **Except perhaps for brand names, so what?** Unless it’s an impulse purchase, does the name influence – assuming it’s not repulsive or has no attached **bad** reputation? Bang & Olufsen may not be very sexy, but in buying high-end stereo equipment would that matter? The impression is the company is run by two Scandinavians, folks with a sound reputation for designing and making technical equipment.
-

Vol.34 No.49
December 16, 1991

THE RIGHT WORDS: OVERCOMMUNICATION DIMINISHES THEIR IMPORT, BUT ALSO MAKES MEMORABILITY CRITICAL – SO THEY'RE AS VITAL AS EVER

As it becomes ever harder to break through the clutter, and as visual media take front row, traditional uses of words seem doomed. For instance, few read paragraphic matter anymore. But buying too far into this trend is counterintuitive. Consider:

- when fewer messages/appeals get through, **memorability** becomes the most valuable quality . . . and it is most often accomplished with words;
- when attacks on organizations become everyday occurrences, effective **rejoinders** are vital . . . and they almost always are expressed in words;
- in visual media, the 20-second **soundbite** rules . . . words, again.

Phil Lesly calls it “nuggetizing.” While they may debase public dialogue by oversimplifying issues, even there they can play a role by making just that point – in memorable, irrefutable words. Some recent edifying examples:

- A sheriff trying to get people to leave the seacoast in the face of a hurricane: “If you insist on staying, I must have your names, ages, addresses and **next of kin to notify.**” (Nearly everyone left the area)
- A parishioner’s response when Queer Nation staged a gay wedding at a cathedral: “This isn’t the way it’s written in the Bible. It wasn’t **Adam and Steve** but Adam and Eve.”
- A columnist questioning officialdom’s attitude toward the unemployed and homeless: “I resent the fact that we take our free market system so seriously that human beings, in the final analysis, become nothing more than **one more commodity.**”
- Jesse Jackson telling why he, as a black, could serve as president: “I know I can adjust to the White House, because **that’s public housing.**”
- Voters in East Detroit, Mich, decided to change their city’s name to avoid what they perceive as the stigma of Detroit. Opting to align linguistically with their neighbors on the other border, tony Grosse Pointe, they approved the change to **Eastpointe.**
- Adventurer Dan Eisaman promoting his cross-the-Atlantic sail in a 12-foot inflatable boat pulled by a kite, when the Coast Guard twice halted his journey: “**Mommy says you can’t go out and play.**”

Then there’s the case of The Church of Scotland, finally bringing out a New Testament in Scots language after 350 years of having English scripture imposed on it. To balance accounts – read get even – in this new Scots Bible **only the Devil speaks English.**

Asked how he navigated without any navigational devices: “**You go until you run into something.**” Asked about his safety concerns: “If I die, I die. Who cares?”

- Tackling that most sensitive topic, religion, author Stephen Arterburn in his book *Toxic Faith: Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (how’s that for memorability): “Everybody wants a miracle. They want it right now and they want it on their terms. It is the natural byproduct of a consumer society – **God as charge card.**”
- A counterproductive example shows why **pithy statements must be filtered for potential boomerang**. White House budget director Richard Darman said the Bush Administration opposed extending jobless benefits to unemployed workers because it could be “counterproductive” with the “**perverse effect of making unemployment attractive.**”
- AP correspondent Susan Schaeffer at the First Amendment Congress, on whistleblowers: “**Truth is like water. It seeks its own level.**”
- **Teddy Kennedy** deflecting criticism of his lifestyle: “Each of us as individuals must not only struggle to make a better world, but to make ourselves better, too. I recognize my own shortcomings – the faults in the conduct of my private life. I realize that I alone am responsible for them, and I am the one who must confront them.”

WORDS CAN BE SYMBOLS, OR MAKE SYMBOLIC ACTS VIBRANT

Yes, words – even very simple ones, strung hauntingly together – and the symbols they accompany or portray, can still move us –

shaping our attitudes and maybe, occasionally, even our behavior. Consider one example from our century:

Marian Anderson, the unbelievable contralto, of whom Toscanini said, “**A voice like this comes once in a century**” (what a soundbite!), first African-American to appear at the Metropolitan Opera, in 1957 . . .

Starting her US career in 1935 after great success in Europe, is denied use of Washington’s only concert stage (in those days), Constitution Hall, by its owner, the Daughters of the American Revolution – because of her race (remember, D.C. is in the South) . . .

So she performs instead on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, to the then-unheard of crowd of 75,000. A civil rights landmark. In protest, Eleanor Roosevelt bitingly resigns from the DAR – a soundbite and symbol – and President Roosevelt asks to address the DAR’s convention, where he begins his remarks “**Fellow immigrants!**” (power in words).

Civil rights makes progress. 30 years later, Martin Luther King leads its most memorable rally, in Washington. Where does he hold it? To recapture Marian Anderson’s symbol, of course at the Lincoln Memorial – where he uses simple, basic words: “**I have a dream!**”

UNDERSTANDING CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES WHO ALWAYS REBUT

The complaint is old: engineers, doctors, marketers, accountants (and some others) are impossible clients, bosses or colleagues because no matter what anyone proposes, they immediately try to tear it apart. Counseling them becomes a painful chore. Why do they act like this?

Probable reason: because a) they are, b) have been trained to think like, or c) follow a process like that used by . . . **scientists**. Scientific investigation begins by trying to disprove the hypothesis. There's no antipathy toward the person who proposed it; that's just how the system works, as a means to get at scientific truth and avoid being lulled into error through subjective or personal reasoning.

KEY TO OPENING THEIR MINDS IS DISCIPLINED LISTENING

Knowing they'll immediately try to rebut, tactic is to wait them out by listening patiently. Countering points as they make them or interrupting is counterproductive. Often they will countermand their initial responses as they think further, so intervening in their thought process tends to leave them stuck on the original, negative retort – which they might change later, given the chance.

Doctors and similar healthcare professionals are applied scientists. Financial professionals have a standardized process of evaluating data that is based on scientific principles. Likewise engineering. Marketers are trained to demand rigorous data. Knowing this makes it easier not to be put off by their rebuttal. It's as natural to them as scratching fleas is to a dog.

When they are finished, they expect to have their thoughts rebutted – or at least responded to. That's also scientific method.

Vol.37 No.37
September 19, 1994

“INFORMATION MAPPING” IMPROVES INFO TRANSFER AND MEMORABILITY

In the desperate quest to break through overcommunication, here’s a writing method (reports, memos, e-mail, manuals, training materials) that is:

- easier and faster to read
- more precise and complete
- quicker to prepare
- orients readers quickly to the content
- helps find and understand the main points
- speeds up decisionmaking
- reduces questions, ambiguities and misunderstandings

Bottomline: saves time and money. It’s based on “how the human mind processes and stores information to learn,” Mark Pramuk of Information Mapping (Waltham, Mass) told pr. To apply it, follow a **three-phase process**:

1. ANALYZE THE AUDIENCE AND THE INFORMATION

Consider: What is the document for? How will it be used? Who is the audience? What do they know/need to know? Key to analyzing information is understanding the seven information types. Each piece of information can be defined according to its purpose – how the reader will use it. Understanding these lets writers determine what the reader needs to know.

KNOW THE SEVEN TYPES OF INFORMATION

- **Procedure:** set of steps that a person performs in order to obtain a specified outcome.
- **Process:** series of events or phases, taking place over time, that has an identified purpose or result.
- **Structure:** physical object or something that can be divided into parts and has boundaries.
- **Concept:** class or group of items which share a unique combination of critical attributes not shared by other groups and which can be referred to by the same generic name or symbol.
- **Principle:** statement that provides what should or should not be done, what seems to be true in light of evidence, or what is unprovable but implied by other statements.
- **Fact:** statement asserted without supporting evidence.
- **Classification:** sorting a group of items or things into classes or categories by one or more attributes.

2. ORGANIZE THE INFORMATION INTO A *USER-FOCUSED* DOCUMENT

The most important step in communicating. Document's purpose guides the main point of information to be included; audience guides the amount of supporting detail to use. Include only information that has a single purpose or function for the reader; exclude all information irrelevant to that purpose or function. This reduces information overload.

3. CONSIDER SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PRESENTATION WHILE ORGANIZING THE DOCUMENT

- **Chunking:** group information into manageable chunks.
- **Relevance:** place "like things" together; exclude unrelated items from; each chunk.
- **Labeling:** provide the reader with a label for each chunk of information.
- **Consistency:** use consistent terms, organization and formats.
- **Integrated graphics:** use tables, illustrations and diagrams as an integral part of the writing.
- **Accessible detail:** write at the level of detail that will make the documents usable for all readers.
- **Hierarchy:** group small chunks around a single topic; provide the group with a label.

USING THIS PROCESS PRODUCES A VISIBLE STRUCTURE OF INFORMATION

The structure allows readers to easily grasp the subject matter by scanning the labels to find the relevant chunks of information. These modular units are also easy to revise – or add to if more than one person is contributing to a document. (More from Information Mapping, 300 Third Ave, Waltham, Mass. 02154; 1-800-MAP-4544)

"It's called 'mapping' because by breaking down the information and the audience, you get a road map for the document. When you do the writing you're just filling in the blanks," explains Pramuk.

Vol.38 No.48
December 4, 1995

REENGINEERING PR MEANS LOOKING AT THE *TONE* OF MATERIALS

For that part of our work requiring communications products - whether print, video or computer - a different type of reengineering appears to be occurring. It deals with a) the tenor and tone of the presentation, as well as with b) information mapping, c) transparent communication and d) using these vehicles to stimulate face-to-face. The guidelines are:

- **Serious** materials and programs are solid but simple, definitely not slick
- **Sales** materials and programs tend to be slick, colorful, packaged

Understanding the difference is crucial – and many seem not to understand.

FOR INSTANCE ...

entertainment, on the one hand, or a sales job by management, on the other. Because these techniques are used in sales brochures and ads, where they may be necessary, we apply them willy-nilly to *all* print materials.

Materials explaining new organizational programs fall into this same trap. They look like, well, sales brochures or product description sheets. Implying, then, that the program can't stand on its merits but must be sold.

Most employee newsletters are design-ey, full of color – as if they were meant to be on the newsstand. This signals they are

New Englanders call the straight-forward, honest stuff “**studied poverty.**” As if you had the means to produce something “expensive” but knew this would communicate far better.

Computer communications suffer from overuse of the art file. Or from filling the screen top to bottom, instead of info mapping brief key points with bullets or numbers. E-mail et al are, after all, just print in another form.

THE RULES SEEM TO BE ...

Serious materials, offering substance, **don't need slickness.** Serious programs don't need special names and logos. What's required is simple, easy-to-understand, offering solid information, that is useful – and therefore meaningful. It may look like a clean, crisp task force report or well done research summary. Fancy design features and slick stock detract from the mission...because they are inappropriate.

GE's reported dictum that “**written communications exist to stimulate face-to-face communication**” is correct. Memos, e-mail etc can sit for days, then be answered in kind – which can sit for more days. A face-to-face get together stops great globs of cycle time being wasted.

Does this mean good design isn't important? Yes – and no. If good design means applying rules of graphic psychology, fine. That's what info mapping is. If it means "art," it's a case of "Danger: designer at work."

People want to be served, not sold – involved, not told.

Vol.39 No.42
October 21, 1996

OOPS! MAYBE THERE'S HOPE FOR PRINT DESPITE COMPUTERS

As a letter-to-the-editor in Los Alamos National Lab's employee publication puts it:

Thank you for removing one of the few real pleasures in life – being able to take the Newsbulletin home, read it in the comfort of my living room (as I do my daily newspapers), let my family read it and discuss items of interest to us all.

*I spend most of my day in front of a personal computer. **Absolutely the last thing I want to do is get my news on-line sitting in front of a terminal** – be it at work or at home – or have to go to the trouble of printing it out on high-quality paper.*

There are still some of us who believe that not everything is best served by being “computerized.” Perhaps we will go the way of the dinosaurs and become extinct.

- **Is the writer part of a minority** that will go away? What a loss – an employee who not only reads the publication but discusses it with family! And a newspaper reader to boot.
- **Or could this view prevail**, since few like to do the same thing incessantly – including squinting at a computer screen?
- While this issue is working itself out in the hearts and minds of Homo Sapiens, the prudent rule for practitioners seems to be **giving target audiences their choice of multiple media availabilities**. Ultimate reader friendliness for now means offering info via

¶ print ¶ fax ¶ e-mail ¶ voice-mail ¶ database

THE TRICKS OF MULTIPLE MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS ARE TO:

1. **Get individuals to state their preferences** – tough with a large group;
 2. **Design a relatively simple system** that sends the same info by multiple channels, though the extra effort may be vital to communicate successfully;
 3. **Information map messages** so they come across pre-organized for the audience(s) regardless of the medium used.
-

STRATEGY FOR AN ERA WHERE FEW HAVE TIME TO READ

Or don't read, for whatever reason. Pulling together the many approaches practitioners report trying since this became a problem produces a five-step strategy:

1. **Use face-to-face as the *primary* medium.** Identifying the opinion leaders or key players is a prerequisite. Then implement interpersonal dialogues, being careful to *listen* to them *first* – so that their perceptions/misperceptions are known before stating your position or case
 - This makes it possible to have an objective discussion of the data even with those who disagree with you, rather than tossing fact grenades back and forth (and stiffening the resistance, maybe forever)
2. **Practice stakeholder involvement and don't even ask them to read.** This requires taking the power and opinion leaders in key stakeholder groups by the hand and persuading them to become involved. No calling for "public participation" – because the only ones who show up are the zealots
 - The trick here is to have activities they *can* get involved in, or specific behaviors they *can* be asked for. Since the most powerful pr tool today is support from 3rd party advocates, this is worth investing significant time and budget in
3. **Structure steps 1 and 2 to build ongoing relationships** so these movers and shakers *will* read follow-up materials once they are involved
 - It's a truism that while we ignore message after message from strangers, we rarely fail to check out what comes to us from those with whom we have relationships
4. **Use print, v-mail, e-mail or news media as followup, not primary, communication.** Once awareness has been created face-to-face – whether it's new info, call to action or whatever – *reinforce* it with traditional media
 - The other way around just doesn't work any more – because they don't read. But the need to make a cogent case, with data and detail, remains and these media provide that opportunity
5. **Information map everything:** publications, memos, e-mail, web sites
 - They will read it only if it's pre-organized, and also will remember it much better (see [pr](#) 11/17/97 for info mapping detail)

TECHNOLOGY TRAP IS MAJOR DANGER TO IMPLEMENTING THIS STRATEGY

The allure of computerized messages – the toy of our times – seems to be leading many practitioners to believe they can escape the hard work involved in this strategy. To believe that people who don't read well-spaced, nicely designed printed material or memos will somehow wade through the extremely difficult to fathom, crowded pages that come via e-mail.

Or that they will not only find the time to go to websites – but get more out of the typical eye candy and dull paragraphic matter there than they would from a high class brochure or publication.

1. This is a retreat to the long disproved belief that information motivates behavior
 - Awareness is required before any behavior occurs, but the evidence is strong that people rarely proceed from awareness to behavior. There are other steps in the process and they involve other people, not data
2. The main impact of technology, as a pr firm CEO put it in pr's 30th Survey of the Profession, is “speed without analysis, data without wise interpretation” (pr 9/28/98)
3. The need for most employers to monitor e-mail and web use pinpoints the problem.

With time and experience, plus new technological development, the effective uses of computer communication will emerge. For instance, the uniform capability on any system of designing how messages appear on the page will make e-mail easier to read and remember. Larger screen will permit seeing a whole page at a time, eliminating the scrolling now required. And who knows what other advantageous elements are now being created in a loft or garage somewhere.

For now, face-to-face relationship-building is the effective strategy.

BY SIMPLIFYING DOCUMENTS FIRST

... organizations can overcome obstacles in the business process, e.g.:

- **Allow all affected groups** in the company – systems, marketing, legal, customer service, pr/pa, operations – to work together for a common cause and gain a clear picture of the end product. Changes can be made before the document is “locked” by the system, when further changes become costly or unfeasible.
 - **For organizations structured along product lines**, with each group producing documents that perform essentially the same function, document simplification works across product lines and focuses on a document’s function in the overall process.
-

15 WAYS TO CUT THRU THE CLUTTER OF OVERCOMMUNICATION

First, of course, practitioners must face the fact overcommunication today is incredible. Many give this concept lip service – but the old-style communication products they produce and the vehicles they use show their disbelief. They go right back to lengthy, hard-to-read, paragraphic matter – almost habitually. Some feel web sites or e-mail somehow overcome the problem, when instead they majorly add to it.

Second, one must have a sound strategy – and preferably a research-based message platform. Then:

3. **MAKE NO LITTLE PLANS.** People today are also overbusy, only have time and energy for bold solutions and ideas. Think big – or else tie your small idea or incremental improvement to a star.
4. **TAKE CHARGE OF THE ISSUE.** You offer the proposals, keeping opponents on the defensive responding to *your* ideas. Otherwise, they make the proposals and you'll have to respond. Do be sure you can walk the talk of what you propose, of course.
5. **ISSUE REPORT CARDS AND SCOREBOARDS.** Candidly tell how you're doing, on a regular basis. When the grade is low, explain why – and ask for help in making improvements. If you have environmental problems, put out a monthly scorecard monitoring results. Once stakeholders see you're reporting regularly, trust levels rise and many even stop paying attention.
6. **CEASE THE ONE-WAY INFO BOMBARDMENT AND LISTEN.** Substitute Management By Walking Around (in the workplace *and* in the community), advisory boards, focus groups, Ambassador programs and research for traditional information transfer devices – which few want today. Ask *yourself*: do you want to get another newsletter? Go face to face and dialogue.
7. **GET EXACTLY THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON.** PRSA's Credibility Index ([prr 8/2/99](#)) underscores again that, today, *who* delivers the message is the most important factor – more than the message itself. College professors and other arm's length or unexpected spokespersons are tops.
8. **SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION.** Words, rhetoric don't do it now. Acts do – behavior. Sterling example: when being introduced as the new CEO of IBM – where white shirts/blouses were mandatory – Lou Gerstner wore a blue shirt. Halfway through the session, he took off his tie. No words were needed to say “things are going to change here.”
9. **USE INFORMATION MAPPING.** Some info demands longer formats. Make it easy to follow with 1,2,3 and A,B,C – plus bullets for sub-points. Organize material into logical chunks. Paginate by topic – don't cram it in and “save paper.” Half filled pages (because that's all it took for that topic) are a pleasant relief in a long document. If you know how to do an outline, you can info map.

10. **CREATE TRIGGERING EVENTS.** Carefully plan actions that make stakeholders have to do something, if they're ready. Can be as simple as a meeting, a special deal with a deadline – but only rarely can it be just info transfer. Example is battery manufacturers and fire chiefs urging us to change the batteries in our smoke detectors when we turn the clocks back from daylight saving time. A huge preaching campaign, complete with ads and publicity and celebrities etc, would not be as effective due to the link with something we have to do regardless.
11. **POINT-OF-BEHAVIOR MESSAGES.** Get a message to folks at the time and place where they will or won't do something. Example: plasticized breast self-exam cards with a readymade diecut hook so women can hang them on showerheads.
12. **REPEAT WITHOUT BEING REPETITIOUS.** Mouth and write those theme lines and soundbites over and over. But let different spokespersons say them ... in different venues ... with slightly divergent emphases. Piggyback them on all communications. Studies of advertising find that about when you and the CEO are tired of them, the messages will just be starting to click with audiences.
13. **MENDELSON'S LAW.** Repeating points endlessly in issue campaigns or other cases where a rationale or line of thought must be spelled out, and where other viewpoints are contending with yours, does not work – because audiences are waiting to hear the rest of your case. Unlike reiterating theme slogans, the trick here is research to determine when a critical mass has heard and understood point #1, then to move to point #2, etc. Research (listening) transforms the campaign into a virtual dialogue: you speak, research tells you when they've got your point, you move on to the next point. Harold Mendelsohn's studies show that sticking with one point tends to turn off your key targets, who are often the most knowledgeable, so catch on earliest and get bored.
14. **SUPERTARGETING.** Stop talking to the world, your opponents and those who won't take action no matter what. Concentrate on the stakeholders whose supportive behaviors are needed now, or who are most ready to be supportive.
15. **SURGICAL MEDIA STRATEGY.** Figure out which media truly reach the opinion leaders in key stakeholder groups – often offbeat or special media. Ignore the general, larger media and get to these opportunity targets with surgical precision. If a key person occasionally reads *NYTimes* but loves *Wilson's Quarterly*, find a way to place something there – where a single story will be more salient than several in the *Times*. Don't try to reach Congress through DC media but their hometown media.

There are other tactics – but this is a good start.

Vol.43 No.20
May 15, 2000

POWERPOINT: ANOTHER COMMUNICATION "IMPROVEMENT" THAT IS OFTEN THE OPPOSITE – A DISTANCING AND OBFUSCATION DEVICE

"How did a piece of technology that was supposed to improve communication become a barrier to it?" asks *The Wall Street Journal*. Easy. Transferring info is only part of a presentation. Connecting with the audience, plus engaging them in the ideas, is more persuasive. PowerPoint – like the endless streams of overheads that preceded it – is canned, cold and usually carries far more detail than the audience wants – or than will get the message across. Besides, usually the lights get turned down – and we all know what effect that has!

- **Remember the trial lawyers' rule:** Never make more than three points to a jury; every additional point erodes the impact and understanding of your case.

WSJ article reported U.S. military is finally catching on to the waste of time and loss of communication caused by the endless, overly detailed briefings that are so much a part of military and government life – and are infecting all types of organizations. Give managers or practitioners a new toy

WHAT MAKES BETTER PRESENTATIONS?

1. Above all, the speaker must connect.

Here as elsewhere, establishing trust and expertise (or call it credibility and knowledge) underlies any sharing of ideas or even data. Have you ever presented research findings to a group that didn't want to believe them? Or strategy proposals to managers or clients who were looking for a silver bullet? Canned slides in a darkened room defeat connecting

2. **Talking to the audience**, of whatever size, making eye contact, looking at all corners of the group – these personalize the interchange. Also permit audience members to do what they're psychologically going to do anyway, consciously or subconsciously – form their perceptions of you. Paying this kind of attention – call it respect – to the audience augurs a positive perception, whether or not you're an accomplished speaker. How many presenters do we all know who are not the smoothest, yet everyone listens and gets their messages – because they speak *with* us, not to us or at us

Overheard in a graduate business school elevator: "What happened?" says one student to another. "When we reviewed our PowerPoint on the computer last night, the presentation seemed great. But on the large screen in that room just now, the green background made it impossible to read. And the jazzy artwork we thought made the visuals so cool just got in the way. The panel (apparently of professors) is going to mark us way down!"

3. **Think of slides, overheads, PowerPoint pages – whatever you call them – as illustrations** to your talk. They symbolize visually the ideas or data you're presenting. Remember a few years back when multimedia presentations were the rage? Research showed the flashing images and loud music actually stopped audiences from getting the messages. It found that, at that stage of

technology, the most powerful presentation was a slide projector, with just a few slides, and a live speaker who spent most of the time talking with – and, if the venue or subject allowed, involving – the audience

We must come out from behind PowerPoint and our computers and converse with our audiences. Which raises the issue: do some practitioners like PowerPoint for precisely the reason they can sit at keyboards and craft messages without having to personally interact with people – a longing to return to the “good old days” when pr basically meant writing? Understandable nostalgia, but

DANGEROUS WHEN DISCUSSING ISSUES

Well-known risk communication specialist Vince Covello calls PowerPoint “a tool not to use when communicating to a highly concerned audience.” He points out that PowerPoint communicates a non-verbal message of linearity, i.e., the audience does not count. Their perception of you as caring and empathetic decreases – and caring/empathy perception counts heavily in the trust factor. Conclusion: **PowerPoint presentation to an audience highly concerned about your issue is a no-win situation.**
