

Must-Have PR Survey Findings of the Year: [an annual compendium from PR News 2006/2007 Edition]

SURVEY FINDINGS ON THESE TOPICS:

- Digital PR
- Measurement
- CSR
- CEO Watch
- Employee Communications
- Ethics
- Media Relations
- Public Affairs
- Diversity
- Top PR Endeavors of all Time
- Product Launches
- Marketing Communications

PRNews

888-707-5814

www.prnewsonline.com

Editorial: 212-621-4873

Sales: 301-354-1761

Marketing: 301-354-1763

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Digital PR

Digital Media Platforms: Is PR Still Behind the Times?

The digitalization of communications has introduced an array of new words into vocabularies industry-wide - podcasts, blogs, RSS feeds — all of which evolved from cryptic cyber dialects among underground “techie” communities to conversational verbiage in everyday business interactions. Public relations professionals have not escaped this transformation, although judging from the results of an April 2006 PR News/MediaLink survey, many are still trying to evade the digital trend and opt for more traditional means of communications.

Of the survey’s 459 respondents, only 18% have created and managed a blog for their company or client, and only 21% have communicated news via a blog; that’s a staggeringly low number considering the hype surrounding the blogosphere. This may stem from the debate surrounding the place of blogs in PR and corporate communications: Who should be writing them? How closely should they be monitored? Is such transparency an asset or a risk?

On the other hand, a larger number — 56% — of respondents have used Webcasts as part of their communications plans in the past year. The discrepancy, says MediaLink COO Larry Thomas, points to a slow but steady move towards adopting digital platforms for everyday PR efforts.

“As the number of broadband users increases and online video is easier to access, it makes sense that clients will continue to gravitate toward these new tools,” he says. “PR professionals have and will continue to embrace digital media platforms as a way to take their message directly to consumers and other target audiences. When combined with traditional media outreach, it is the best way to maximize ROI.”

That may be the case, but the results indicate that traditional media outreach is still the main focus of many PR execs; what else would account for the low percentage of blog and podcast (10%) users?

“I’d like to think [the results] are an anomaly, and that these respondents are just late-adopters,” says Steve Cody, managing partner and co-founder of New York-based agency Peppercom. “There is a reactionary school of thought that digital platforms are just a passing fad and that users will get burned like they did when the dot-com bubble burst. But I think the perceived time investment is at the heart of the passivity.”

Cody operates his own blog, <http://www.repman.com>, where he espouses “the importance of a good reputation in a world gone mad” from the perspective of the PR exec himself. Most significant, though, is his constant interaction with its content: He updates it almost every day, debunking the assumption that PR managers don’t have time to keep up with digital communications platforms. So if time management issues are the crux of why some PR pros are moving at dial-up speed to adopt digital platforms, then consider Cody’s advice:

“Incorporate blogging into your daily schedule the same way you would an exercise routine,” he says. “Otherwise, [PR professionals] can ignore it at their own risk.”

PR'S Use of Digital Media Platforms

1. Which of the following digital media platforms have you used as part of your communications plans in the past year?
 - Webcasts: 56%
 - Podcasts: 10%
 - Blogs: 34%
2. When have you used a podcast in your public relations campaign?
 - New product announcement: 3%
 - Business news: 5%
 - Health news: 1%
 - General consumer news: 5%
 - Not applicable: 87%
3. Do you or your client plan to create an audio or video podcast in the future?
 - Yes : 30%
 - No: 26%
 - Maybe: 44%
4. Have you created and managed a blog for your company or client?
 - Yes : 18%
 - No: 82%
5. Do you communicate your news directly to blogs?
 - Yes : 21%
 - No: 79%
6. Tell us about your experiences with satellite and radio media tours:
 - a. Have you (or someone on your team) participated in a Co-op Media Tour in the past year?
 - Yes : 16%
 - No: 84%
 - b. Satellite media tours can be produced from a studio or a location anywhere in the world. When planning locations for SMTs, do you seek out remote locations?
 - Yes : 11%
 - No: 75%
 - Sometimes: 14%
 - c. Do you augment Satellite Media Tours with Radio Media Tours?
 - Yes : 13%
 - No: 69%
 - Sometimes: 18%

Traditional Media Trumps New

- Blog popularity is by no means stalling, but a Fall 2006 study released by Burson-Marsteller this month suggests that traditional media is still highly valued by the “most influential members of the online community as they carry out their roles as information and opinion providers.”

Among the findings:

- 80 percent of respondents say they read blogs but carry out further research to confirm what they find
- 64 percent fact-check blog entries against news or magazine Web sites
- 44 percent fact-check against print articles in newspapers and magazines
- 49 percent cite online news sites as the most credible sources of information about companies, while 48 percent turn to traditional newspapers and magazines

The results are dichotomous for communications professionals who, in the midst of the new media blitz, have been forced to redirect their attention from traditional outlets to more up-and-coming alternatives like blogs, podcasts and online communities. For some, this survey may be an impetus (or an excuse) to reaffirm their faith in paper products.

What, Me, Worry About Click Fraud?

Any company engaged in pay-per-click advertising knows it's a risky proposition, because advertisers shell out money to a search engine every time a surfer clicks on the company's links, a practice notoriously difficult to control. The price and placement depend mainly on how much the advertiser wants to bid for its keywords, but the potential for fraud perpetrated by deliberately manipulating the keyword searches and clicks can amount to far more than chump change.

The amount of click fraud is difficult to quantify; estimates of the proportion of fake clicks run from as low as 1 in 10 to as high as 1 in 2. In a study released November 2006, MarketingExperiments.com, an online marketing research outfit, reported that “as much as 29.5%” of the clicks in three experimental PPC campaigns on Google were fraudulent. Outsell analysts estimate the phenomenon at about 13%.

Marketing Sherpa conducted a study of 3,944 search marketers to learn how high concerns about click fraud really run. The numbers came as a bit of a surprise to the survey team, reflecting lower-than-expected levels of worry.

- 55% said that, like e-mail spam, click fraud will continue to cost time and money;
- 20% say click fraud is a non-issue or will become a non-issue before long; and
- 9% were worried that click fraud will only get worse.

Marketing Sherpa cited three types of marketers that could be particularly vulnerable: extremely competitive niche SMB industries; sites paying affiliates and partners by the click; and second-tier search advertisers.

E-mail Overload

The seemingly infinite number of communication channels has made it a small world after all, but that doesn't mean business professionals are happy about it. A new survey of more than 1,700 business communications executives by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) reveals that e-mail overload is a clear and present danger — or, at least a clear and present nuisance: 93% of PDA users report being negatively affected by e-mail overload. Other results include:

- 85% say e-mail overload is having a negative affect on their productivity at least some of the time;
- 62% of all respondents and 75% of Blackberry users report receiving too much e-mail;
- 44% of all respondents and 56% of Blackberry users report sending too much e-mail;
- 61% cite the biggest cause of e-mail overload as external news sources and professional subscriptions, followed by co-workers (39%), professional networks (34%), team/department sources (29%) and companywide corporate sources including senior management and HR (23%);
- 81% of respondents say their e-mail is always open; and
- 40% claim to spend two hours daily responding to e-mail.

What Does the C-Suite Think of Corporate Blogging?

A new report suggests the C-suite has yet to appreciate the view. The Makovsky 2006 State of Corporate Blogging Survey polled 150 senior executives from the Fortune 1000, but found relatively few were ready to embrace corporate blogs for communications purposes.

The survey, conducted by Harris Interactive for the New York agency Makovsky + Company determined that only 5% of those polled were convinced to “a great extent” that corporate blogging is growing in credibility either as a communications medium, whereas 3% saw it as a tool for brand-building technique and less than 1% were convinced of its ability to generate sales or leads. These same executives saw minimal or no credibility for corporate blogs in these three areas (62%, 74%, and 70% respectively).

Furthermore, only 15% of the respondents stated someone on staff is currently writing a blog related to the company and/or its activities. For Robbin Goodman, executive vice president at Makovsky + Company, this C-suite attitude clearly presents challenges for the corporate communications officers. “We feel you can't be in the public relations business today and not have a handle on what is going on with blogging.”

Goodman notes that some corners of the corporate world (most notably General Motors and high-tech companies including IBM and Microsoft and European companies including Accenture Netherlands, Thomson UK, Benetton and Guinness) have already got the blogging message. However, she stresses that corporations must have a set blogging policy in place before anyone starts to hit the keyboard.

“As with any other public relations function, there needs to be strategic planning,” says Goodman. “Employees must have a corporate blogging policy that defines what they should and should not be talking about.”

CSR/Ethics

Shhh! Don't Talk About Our Ethics...

While most companies agree that ethical behavior in the workplace is very important, they are surprisingly reticent when it comes to discussing such issues around the water cooler. According to an IABC report conducted in May 2006, "The Business of Truth: A Guide to Ethical Communication," most organizations maintain or practice a generally "healthy" climate for ethical concerns and issues. Findings included:

- 70% say their organization makes it clear to employees what is ethically acceptable and what is not acceptable.
- 67% agree with the statement that top management has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behavior will not be tolerated.

However, the research also found that only 61% of companies encourage openness about ethical/unethical conduct in their organizations and only 46% of companies encourage discussion of moral dilemmas and censurable conduct in their organizations.

The research also explored organizational values about ethical conduct of managers. The majority of the study's respondents (69%) disagreed with the statement that managers in their company often engaged in unethical behavior. When questioned further on corporate values on reprimanding unethical behavior, 68% of communicators said their companies would promptly reprimand managers found to be acting unethically for personal gain. However, if the unethical behavior was primarily for corporate gain, only half the respondents (51%) believed that the manager would be reprimanded by their company.

CSR's Internal Company Profile

A survey released in Fall 2006 by the Business for Social Responsibility and the Global Environmental Management Initiative revealed that corporate social responsibility has a high profile inside many companies, in addition to the external visibility. Of the 54 surveyed sustainable business professionals:

- 72% said that their CEO publicly communicates the company's commitment to CSR;
- 79% said they believe there is a strong connection between their company's words and actions; and
- 48% believe board-level oversight of social performance is strong; however, only 36% believe the same is true when it comes to environmental performance.

Ethical Behavior Pays Solid Dividends

Profitability favors ethical organizations, according to a new study released by Corpedia, a specialist in risk assessment and eLearning for ethics and compliance. According to the survey, such ethical corporations as Starbucks, Timberland and Whole Foods outperformed other S&P500 organizations by more than 370 percent over five years. This "Ethics Index" tracks the stock performance of publicly traded companies that are recognized for their corporate citizenship, ability to attract and retain employees, and sustainability practices. The average five-year return on the Ethics Index was 102% compared with 26% for the S&P500. The obvious conclusion: It pays to play nicely with your colleagues and customers, as well as the world at large.

New CSR Trends Redefine Doing Well By Doing Good

When the oil tanker Exxon Valdez hit Bligh Reef off the coast of Alaska in March of 1989 and subsequently spilled millions of gallons of oil into the waters, it quickly became a crisis of international proportions; more than that, it also sent environmentalism into a new stratosphere of corporate (and non-corporate) interest. Whether or not that tragedy was the bait for increased attention to environmentally sound business practices, it certainly kick-started a wave of corporate social responsibility (CSR)-themed initiatives and concerns throughout the business world. After all, \$287 million in actual damages, \$5 billion in punitive damages and 1,900 kilometers of affected coastline aren't numbers that can be brushed off easily.

But now, nearly 20 years later, CSR is the crux of an evolution that will redefine the practice. Surveys are returning numbers and revealing findings that challenge the traditional "green-only" focus of CSR practices, and communications executives are taking note.

According to Fleishman-Hillard's CSR blog (<http://csrblog.fleishmanhillard.com>), "There are many reasons why CSR is good business. The payoffs of CSR include stronger brand image reputation; improved employee recruitment, retention and morale; better customer satisfaction; increased shareholder value; and lower risk of boycotts and litigation."

Not only is CSR taking new form when it comes to specific business outcomes, it also applies largely to the more intangible concept of corporate reputation and brand, and not on an environment- only scale. Specifically, more and more surveys are uncovering nontraditional CSR attributes, raising a series of key questions: When it comes to defining CSR, are employees the new environment? What role does technology play in CSR's new direction? Do demographics have an impact on companies' CSR initiatives?

Do Employees Trump The Environment?

In May of 2006, Fleishman-Hillard released a survey of 800 U.S. adults indicating that consumers are more inclined to define CSR in ways most relevant to them, and respondents defined CSR most frequently as how companies treat their employees. (See graph.)

"More than half of Americans said the treatment of employees trumped everything else," says Tony Calandro, VP, Fleishman-Hillard St. Louis. "It does not mean that concern for the environment, charitable contributions and other areas are not important — they are. But, we asked Americans to state what was the most important to them, and treatment of employees mattered most to almost 50 percent of all Americans."

This transition from largely environmental concerns to more subjective, personally relevant ones is a noteworthy trend, as companies would be ill-advised to disregard employees' wants and needs, and communications executives are often the liaison in terms of internal communications and employee relations. This new (or newly uncovered) CSR dimension of employee relations adds another layer to the PR/communications department's job. What's more, it's a dimension that works both ways: A study released by progressive community network Care2 shows that 48 percent of employees say they would work for less pay if they had an opportunity with a socially responsible company, and 40 percent said they would work longer hours. A study of 2,100 MBA students conducted by Net Impact also found that slightly more than half of respondents would accept a lower salary to work for a socially responsible company.

Thus, while employees may appear to be more concerned with the personal impacts of CSR initiatives, a large population appears willing to make personal sacrifices in the name of CSR.

“Communications execs should take a step back and analyze what types of messages their company is communicating to the public. Are different business units within a company sending conflicting messages? Is a company communicating its values?” Calandro asks. “In order to gain the maximum corporate enhancement opportunities a CSR program can provide to a company, CSR messages should be fully integrated throughout the company.”

Tech Strikes Again

The Fleishman survey also shows findings on how the changing technology landscape is transforming the way consumers gather and communicate information on companies’ social responsibility. Among the findings:

- 58 percent of respondents claim the Internet has made consumers more informed about companies’ CSR;
- 47 percent have used the Internet to learn about the extent to which a company is socially responsible; and
- 63 percent want information available through new Internet tools

These findings fall in line with the widely covered phenomena of new media’s impact on business. However, they also impact the way PR professionals do their jobs, as communicating with constituents via new media platforms — blogs, podcasts, etc. — increases the pressures and loosens control surrounding message dissemination.

Generation Y Has A Conscience After All

It turns out that senior management and “vintage” consumers aren’t the only ones who are catching on to the changing face of CSR; contrary to its MTV-watching, iPod-listening reputation, Generation Y is redefining itself as a group that is not only concerned with social responsibility, but also actually feels compelled to personally participate in it. A survey of 1,800 Gen Y-ers (people between the ages of 13 and 25) released by Boston-based Cone and AMP Insights found that:

- 61 percent agreed they are personally responsible for making a difference in the world;
- 78 percent think companies have the same responsibility;
- 75 percent are more likely to pay attention to a company’s messages if it has a deep commitment to a cause; and
- Nearly 90 percent stated they are “likely” or “very likely” to switch from one brand to another based on a strong association with a good cause.

With all this in mind, marketing and PR pros must find appropriate and targeted ways to bring their organizations’ social responsibility initiatives to a specific — and very diverse — audience. The most important point is to make sure that all CSR programs are very brand-specific. In other words, donating loose change to any and all charitable organizations does nothing to bolster brand and reputation for a specific company; rather, it looks like a half-ditch effort to cross CSR off the to-do list, and young constituents are very perceptive to this subversive tactic.

Perhaps PR execs don’t need a slew of surveys to recognize CSR’s changing tide, but it doesn’t hurt to reemphasize new — and sometimes drastic — measures needed to make CSR an intrinsic characteristic of every corporation. It has an impact on the bottom line, on brand and reputation, and on employees’ willingness to outperform competitors.

Planting trees and writing checks alone won’t cut it, and everyone, including CEOs and the notoriously tuned-out Generation Y, is taking note. After all, in the words of CSR archetype Ben & Jerry’s founders Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, “When business starts using its voice for the benefit of the country as a whole, not just in its narrow self-interest, it can really be the force that can make the changes that need to be made.”

Responsible Companies Bounce Back Better

According to a new survey from Weber Shandwick, global business executives are touting the positive impacts of corporate social responsibility in a big way, especially when it comes to crisis recovery. The study, which surveyed 950 global business executives in 11 countries and was conducted in partnership with KRC Research, found that:

- 79% of surveyed executives believe that companies with strong CSR records recover faster from a crisis than those with weaker records; and
- 55% say that being recognized as committed to corporate responsibility contributes “a lot” to a company’s overall reputation.

CEO Watch

Sorry No More

- Bad news for the apologists among us: The “Safeguarding Reputation” study released by Weber Shandwick in Fall 2006 revealed that, of the 950 global business leaders surveyed, a 59 percent majority see public apologies by CEOs as less effective than other strategies when it comes to crisis and tarnished reputations. Instead, respondents identified the following as the best steps to reputation recovery:
- Announce specific actions the CEO will take to fix the problem and create an early warning system (76 percent)
- Establish procedures and policies the company will follow to demonstrate its commitment to being a responsible citizen (73 percent)
- Work closely with legal counsel on public disclosures (72 percent)
- Issue regular public progress reports to address the problem (71 percent)

These findings, while in conflict with human nature’s tendency to apologize now, act later, should serve as an impetus for PR professionals to start tweaking that crisis management plan ... again.

Is the Rate Of CEO Turnover Stabilizing?

Communicating CEO departures and managing subsequent succession plans have long been on the proverbial communications to-do list, making a recent Weber Shandwick survey of particular interest to PR/comms managers. The study monitored the level of CEO movement among the 500 largest revenue-producing U.S. companies in the first three quarters of 2006 — including departures, interim CEOs and insider versus outsider CEOs — and compared the data with previous years, revealing the following findings:

- There was a 16 percent decline in CEO turnover, with 49 CEOs departing thus far versus the 58 who did so last year.
- Of the new CEOs announced in the first three quarters of 2006, 18 percent were interim CEOs (9 out of 49). By comparison, nine interim CEOs were announced in all of 2005, and only two interim were named in 2004.
- One-third of Fortune 500 CEOs made the “Five Year Club,” identifying CEOs who held the title from 2000 to 2005.

If these survey results are any indication, perhaps the tumultuous business environment that catapulted many CEOs from their leadership posts is flattening out — or maybe it’s a matter of CEOs learning a lesson or two from peers who were caught up in scandals and unable to communicate their way out of them. Either way, it’s a trend worth watching.

Strong Performance Leads to Better CEO Pay

America’s executive pay-for-performance model is working, judging from Fall 2006 new Watson Wyatt survey, which found that CEOs at higher-performing companies have significantly greater “realizable” pay, especially from long-term incentive (LTI) awards. It’s a trend of note for PR professionals who are largely responsible for managing CEOs public images, and consumers are often less-endearred to the highest-paid ones in spite of their company’s higher performance. The study, based public data from 793 companies in the S&P Composite 1500, found that:

- Between 2003 and 2005, the median realizable LTI for CEOs at higher-performing companies was \$4.4 million, compared with just \$1.5 million for CEOs at lower-performing companies

Shareholder Activism

- A study released recently by Thomson Financial revealed that shareholder activists are achieving their goals with growing success rates, thus prompting the need for open lines of communication between activists and management.

The findings include:

- Surveyed activists showed an 80 percent success rate when specifically targeting the removal of a CEO
- Examples of opening communication with activists (Wendy's, McDonald's) led to increased capital with investors
- Closed lines can negatively impact stock performance, as they did in the cases of Salton Inc., Ligand Pharmaceuticals and Nabi Biopharmaceuticals

Measurement

Who Says No One's Measuring?

I recently had a conversion experience. No, it wasn't religious! It was, instead, related to the PR measurement world, and to my new-found faith in my fellow practitioners.

It came as the result of secondary research I pulled for a debate that was featured at the recent Institute for PR Commission Measurement Summit in New Hampshire. Eight of us commission-members were asked to either support or refute propositions that had to do with why people in our industry don't measure their work properly, and who was to blame.

As I dug into an enormous pile of articles, reports and papers covering the last few years, I began to realize that the propositions themselves were faulty! Who says PR folks don't measure their work? Who says they aren't starting to do so 'properly?' As we in the measurement world beat our chests over the perceived lack of appreciation for our work, are we so sure that all the measurement articles, webinars and conferences we've undertaken during the past decade haven't indeed had an effect?

In fact, according to this compilation of data, PR measurement is making huge gains across the industry, resulting in a greater percentage of client PR officers reporting directly to the C-suite. Here are a few citations to whet your whistle:

- A 2004 PR News/PRtrak Survey, "Attitudes Toward PR Measurement & Evaluation" by David Michaelson, Ph. D., found that 81 percent of respondents were "interested to very interested" in measuring PR. Of those that are measuring, two out of three send analysis reports all the way up to the C-suite.
- A 2004 Survey from Benchmark in 25 countries found that 69% of Client practitioners measure their work, and 77 percent intend to do so.
- The 2003-2004 Annual PR Generally Accepted Practices (G.A.P.) Studies by USC Annenberg found that measurement budgets now average between 4.5-7 percent, which is way up from what other studies have reported to date; and, that 64 percent of PROs now report directly to the C-Suite ... up seven points from the year before.
- A 2005 Poll by the Council of PR Firms found that more marketing executives today understand the growing importance of PR in an increasingly fragmented media environment.

Furthermore, not only is PR measurement growing, but "proper" measurement that gauges the real impact of outputs on outcomes is replacing old clip-count methods:

- The 2004 PR News/PRtrak Survey found that 42 percent of client respondents were measuring outcomes, whereas three years prior, a similar study found barely 25 percent were doing so.
- A 2005 Council of PR Firms article stated that, "Along with growing demand, PR measurement is becoming more sophisticated. Thanks to innovations in PR metrics and to lessons learned from other marketing disciplines, PR executives are moving beyond measuring PR outputs to increasingly measuring its contribution to business outcomes, including sales."
- The Generally Accepted Practices (G.A.P.) Studies by USC Annenberg looked at 26 different methodologies for measurement and evaluation, and found that influence on corporate reputation' was by far the top-ranked measure to evaluate the effectiveness of public relations.

Admittedly, this is only a sampling of evidence that suggests progress is being made on the PR measurement front. But it was enough to restore my faith in my fellow practitioners.

So, what does all this mean to the average practitioner?

1. It's time to face the facts: If you are not measuring your work, you are likely to soon find yourself in a shrinking, non-competitive, minority.
2. Go to school on the subject: Whatever your experience level, read the white papers on the IPR Commission for PR Measurement & Evaluation web site (<http://www.instituteforpr.com>); buy the measurement books and how-to kits on the PRSA and IABC Web sites. They are as good as gold for those who hope to report to the C-Suite someday.
3. Measure something, anything: If you are new to measurement, or have a miniscule budget, just pick a project and apply some of the do-it-yourself tips illustrated in the books and papers above. It may be as simple as running an informal focus group, or analyzing the tone of your press clips.
4. If you can't count it, don't do it: At some point, make a commitment to yourself to think in measurement terms for all your communications initiatives. Set meaningful, measurable objectives, and plan how you will measure results before your campaign gets started. Develop the discipline to 'just say no' to activities that can't be measured, and devote your resources to those that can.

This was written by Angela Jeffrey, APR, is vice president of editorial research for VMS, for PR News on Oct. 30, 2006

The Numbers Don't Lie

Still not a believer in measurement? The C-suite is. A handful of survey results from past years just might prompt you to take a sip from the Holy Grail of measurement.

- Executives spend 24 percent of their time on "plan measurement and monitoring," second only to "strategic thinking/planning," according to a July/August 2004 Gallup poll
- Board directors and CEOs are more likely than other professionals to say that "measurement is an integral part of PR." (Cited from a Benchmark Report from the 2004 Summit on Measurement)
- Nearly 60 percent of companies with formal measurement tools in place created them at the request of senior management, according to an industry publication.
- Only 22 percent of senior marketers consider PR effective for driving sales, according to an Advertising Age/Council of PR Firms Survey (all the more reason to get behind measurement)

Source: Paul Argenti, professor at the Tuck School of Business and John Gilfeather, ice chairman of custom research provider GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media, XXXX

Product Launches & Marcom

Creativity Economy Ups The Comms Ante

- A Fall 2006 survey from Weber Shandwick, conducted by KRC Research and entitled “The Changing Face of Marketing and Communications in Today’s Creativity Economy,” points to an emerging migration from a knowledge-based to a creativity-based economy and suggests that the marketing/communications industry is evolving accordingly.

The survey, which polled more than 100 CEOs and CMOs at Fortune 2000 companies, reveals senior executives’ thoughts and strategies to meet the needs of consumers in this changing business environment. Given an increasingly creativity-based economy, for example, there is a growing emphasis on understanding and incorporating the customer’s viewpoint and on marketing/advertising expenditures that enhance the way consumers think and talk about the company itself, not just the product.

Among the findings:

- 86 percent of respondents feel that the marketing and communication function has become an increasingly important tool for business success
- 84 percent said their company is changing their advertising/marketing and communication practices based on the Creativity Economy concept.
- 80 percent see tighter collaboration between product development and marketing
- 73 percent find their marketing function becoming more actively involved in the research and development or product development process at their companies.
- 68 percent stated that their communications practices are expanding as a result of the Creativity Economy.

Top Country Brands

It pays to live Down Under when it comes to branding, according to the 2006 Country Brand Index released by FutureBrand in conjunction with Weber Shandwick. The index, which polls more than 1,500 international travelers, industry experts and hospitality professionals, examines how countries can be branded and ranked according to key criteria. The results revealed the following top-dogs in various categories:

- Australia ranks as the top overall country brand;
- The U.S ranks as the top country brands for doing business, families and shopping; and
- Thailand ranks as the top country brand for the value for money.

The New Products Conundrum: Securing a PR Strategy

Spreading the word about a new product is among the most invigorating experiences for a PR professional — or at least it is invigorating for those who are up to the challenge. Putting the message out in today’s communications environment requires more research, planning and outreach than ever before. As PR broadens its reach in both a human realm (with a greater emphasis on experiential and guerrilla marketing tactics) and a technological sphere (with new media vehicles and a seemingly endless skein of new online outlets), the targeting of new product introductions has become more complex.

A survey conducted in mid-2006 by PR News and Medialink has found the industry accommodating these new schematics and placing greater emphasis on strategies that barely existed a few years earlier. The survey, which polled 517 PR professionals, details both B2B and B2C campaigns.

The Price Is Right

The good news, according to the survey, comes at the financial level — the increased workload involved in new products' PR campaigns is being supported with proper monetary buttressing. The survey found 79% of those polled saw increases in their budgets for launch products, as opposed to 20% who had to work with fewer funds.

One key area contributing to this financial support could possibly be traced to not having funds redirected to the regulatory process (and the added expenses accompanying it). Again, 79% of those surveyed did not require regulatory approval for the new products while 21% did.

For Medialink's COO Larry Thomas, the statistics also point to the growing acknowledgement of PR's value within the product launch process — to the point that funds once earmarked for other promotional channels are now being deposited in the PR budget.

"We're seeing more and more signs that PR is being looked up as an integral approach in getting the message out," he says. "A lot of companies are looking at PR as a natural way to help educate rather than sell to people. We're seeing a small percentage of dollars being shifted to PR from marketing budgets."

Beat The Clock

But if money is on the side of the PR professional, time is not. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed stated they had half-a-year or less to get the word out. The survey found 39% had a typical product rollout program lasting three-to-six months, while 38% had to work in a window of three months or less. Those enjoying the seeming luxury of six-to-12 months accounted for only 17%, while those who experienced rollouts lasting a full year or longer were a mere 6%.

For Thomas, the relatively short window for new product promotions is a reflection of today's society. "This is a sign of the pace of life," he explains. "We have an accelerated and enhanced need to do things bigger, better, sooner and faster. This also may have been impacted positively by new media platforms that have the ability to permeate the media and reach their audiences directly."

The new platforms, of course, are the digital media vehicles that reconfigured PR distribution strategies. The PR News/Medialink survey also questioned the favored new tools of the digital trade. At the top of the list were multimedia press releases (27%), search engine marketing (18%), blogs (14%) and Webcasts (14%). Less popular strategies include microsites (9%) and podcasts (6%).

But when push comes to shove (or click, if you will), having person-to-person communications rather than relying on modems is still preferred. For B2B programs, the most popular platforms for new product announcements include the issuance of press releases and accompanying press interviews (30%), live press conferences and/or trade show events (19%), radio and/or television interviews (12%) and PR-produced ANRs and VNRs (8%). Blogs and Web-based activities only accounted for 2%, respectively, sharing bottom feeder status with direct mail at 1%. A potpourri of strategies was collected into an "other" category (8%) that included such tactics as analyst and media tours, open house events and white paper presentations.

On the B2C side, the situation was fairly similar. The top choice for new product promotions was the issuance of press releases and accompanying press interviews (28%), radio and/or television interviews (21%), live press conferences and/or trade show events (14%) and PR-produced ANRs and VNRs (13%). For

the B2C products, however, blogs, Web-based activities and direct mail barely registered — they were lumped together into a grab-bag “other” category (8%) that included such tactics as sample mailings, live concerts and charity donations.

However, Thomas believes that over time the value of the digital delivery systems will grow while economic circumstances will force many PR programs to rethink their person-to-person approaches.

“From a budgetary standpoint, PR professionals will be able to leverage the new tools and save a lot of money in delivering messages without the need to physically be in one place,” he says.

However, there are still those who believe in the power of person-to-person communications. Larry Borden, president of The Borden Agency in Philadelphia, is a leader in the fields of mobile marketing and experiential promotions and he is not convinced that digital media is going to challenge (let alone surpass) in-person PR.

“You can rise above the clutter,” says Borden of the person-to-person approach. “You can go where you want to go and where your demographic is hanging out. It gives you the ability to street test and research your efforts — and get immediate feedback.”

PR’s Role in Product Launches

1. For the current year, my PR budget for launch programs has:
 - Increased: 79%
 - Decreased: 20%
 - No Response: 1%
2. Which was the primary audience for your most recent product or service launch?
 - B2C: 52%
 - B2B: 47%
 - No Response: 1%
3. What is the duration of a typical rollout program for your industry?
 - 3 to 6 months: 39%
 - 0 to 3 months: 38%
 - 6 to 12 months: 17%
 - More than 1 year: 6%
4. Was your most recent product or service launch subject to regulatory approval?
 - No: 79%
 - Yes: 21%

5. (For B2B programs only) Indicate which of these communications tools are part of your media strategy to support new product announcements. Check as many as necessary
- Press releases or print interviews: 30%
 - Live press conference or trade show event: 19%
 - No Response : 18%
 - Radio or television interviews: 12%
 - PR-produced audio or video for broadcast media: 8%
 - Direct mail: 1%
 - Blogs: 2%
 - Web: 2%
 - Other: 8%
6. (For B2C programs only) Indicate which of these communications tools are included in your media strategy to support new product announcements. Check as many as necessary.
- Press releases or print interviews: 28%
 - Radio or television interviews: 21%
 - No Response: 15%
 - Live press conferences or trade show events: 14%
 - PR-produced audio or video for broadcast media: 13%
 - Other: 8%
7. Which of these digital media resources have you used in your new product campaigns? Check as many as necessary.
- Multimedia press releases: 27%
 - Search engine marketing: 18%
 - Blogs: 14%
 - Audio or video Webcasts: 14%
 - No Response: 12%
 - Microsites: 9%
 - Podcasts: 6%

Source: *PR News* and *Medialink*

517 total respondents

Media Relations

The Beat Goes On Whether PR Pros Are Online Or Not

Media relations may have kick-started its existence as the prime pillar of the public relations field, but the industry has since evolved and matured to encompass a far more complex combination of practices. Nevertheless, the media relations sub-function remains integral to PR efforts across all organizations, and changing trends in business and technology have further deepened its evaluation capabilities.

However, based on a Fall 2006 survey by PR News and Medialink, "Media Relations: A Daily Grind or Not?," communications executives show mixed responses on techniques used to field media inquiries, as well as on the nature of their working relationship with journalists. It's not a slight to the profession, but a call to action: Despite the technological surge over the past decade, there are still surprising signs of how much time is wasted responding to media requests because of the archaic methods employed.

Case in point: 17 percent of the 700+ respondents report spending more than 10 hours per week handling media requests for PR materials. Perhaps this number is unnecessarily high due to two other findings: 93 percent of respondents claim the majority of the files requested are done so digitally, but a startlingly high 58 percent don't have online newsrooms.

"That the digital format is most frequently requested is an obvious call to action for decision makers to make material available online," says Larry Thomas, COO of Medialink. "So it's even more surprising that the number of respondents who don't have an online newsroom is so high."

Surprising, yes, especially considering the resounding demand from journalists, who frequently turn to such online features to get information quickly and easily. In fact, a recent study released by newsroom software developers TEKgroup International revealed that 99 percent of surveyed journalists believe companies should have online newsrooms — that's up 20 percent from the 2005 study (see PR News, 09-11-06). What's more, they rank the top-five most "important" to "very important" elements of an online newsroom to be press releases, a search module, PR contacts, photographs and product information.

So if journalists expect online newsrooms and PR executives spend so much time fielding requests, the solution seems obvious: Create an online newsroom, as it will satisfy journalists' needs and cut down on the amount of time spent handling inquiries.

If budget is the main setback in constructing such a feature, Thomas urges communications managers to quickly dismiss that assumption. "The fact that companies don't create a newsroom because of budget constraints is a myth," he says. "People would be surprised at how inexpensive they can be, and at how quickly they can be up and running." Plus, the benefits will quickly cover the costs, as the amount of time and resources previously spent handling requests by hand can be redirected to other initiatives.

PR professionals who have yet to create an online newsroom should explore the various tools available for such an endeavor, from templates that can be purchased inexpensively to custom packages constructed with the specific company's needs in mind. There are options for pocketbooks of all sizes, and features that complement any level of technology know-how. The viability of PR's media relations efforts may hang in the balance.

"PR is not very curious about technology in general," says Mary Buhay, SVP of corporate communications for Medialink. "It's time to pull people from the dark ages." Contacts:

Larry Thomas, 212.812.7154, lthomas@medialink.com; Mary Buhay, 212.812.7006, mbuhay@medialink.com

Media Relations: A Daily Grind Or Not?

1. How many hours per week do you or staff members spend responding to media requests for PR material? Select one.

0 to 2.5 hours 35%

2.5 to 5 hours 31%

5 to 10 hours 17%

more than 10 hours 17%

2. Rank these media resources in terms of most often requested of you by journalists. (1= most; 6= least)

Documents

1. 61%

2. 17%

3. 8%

4. 4%

5. 4%

6. 5%

No response 1%

Photographs

1. 24%

2. 41%

3. 16%

4. 6%

5. 5%

6. 6%

No response 2%

Video

1. 6%

2. 6%

3. 14%

4. 20%

5. 22%

- 6. 28%
- No response 4%

Audio

- 1. 5%
- 2. 5%
- 3. 5%
- 4. 12%
- 5. 29%
- 6. 39%
- No response 5%

Graphics

- 1. 6%
- 2. 16%
- 3. 37%
- 4. 17%
- 5. 13%
- 6. 8%
- No response 3%

Slide presentations

- 1. 5%
- 2. 5%
- 3. 8%
- 4. 17%
- 5. 11%
- 6. 49%
- No response 5%

- 3. Which format represents the majority of files requested by the media? Select one.
 - Digital 93%
 - Hard Copy 6%
 - No Response 1%

4. Rank these in order of the most requested method of delivery? (1= most; 6 = least)

Email

1.92%

2.2%

3.1%

4.0

4.1%

5.1%

6.2%

No response 1%

Express or overnight shipment

1.2%

2.29%

3.22%

4.26%

4.9%

5.6%

6.9%

No response 6%

Regular mail

1.2%

2.8%

3.24%

4.39%

5.8%

6.13%

No response 6%

Fax

1.3%

2.34%

3.18%

4.24%

5.7%

6.9%

No response 5%

File Transfer Protocol (FTP)

- 1.3%
- 2.13%
- 3.14%
- 4.34%
- 5.97%
- 6.17%
- No response 10%

Satellite delivery

- 1.4%
- 2.1%
- 3.1%
- 4.8%
- 5.26
- 6.47%
- No response 13%

Proprietary media submission systems

- 1.3%
- 2.1%
- 3.2%
- 4.12%
- 5.18%
- 6.51%
- No response 13%

5. Do you currently have an online newsroom to help fulfill requests from journalists? Select one.

- Yes 41%
- No 58%
- No response 1%

Diversity & Employee Relations

Diversity in the Workplace: It's Not About Quotas — It's About Added Value

It's an issue that has seen a lot of press over the years, but that in no way diminishes its importance. And although concerns about diversity in the workplace remain a priority that's here to stay, communications managers — and their executive-level peers — might be spinning their wheels when it comes to addressing the issue. No definitive measures have been taken yet to define this rather nebulous concept as it applies to the realm of PR.

A PR News/Counselors Academy survey in October 2006 polled nearly 300 PR professionals and determined that diversity is a viable concern in the minds of many executives, with 59 percent of respondents agreeing that hiring a diverse workforce is a "major issue" in the industry. However, it's not the sweeping majority that perhaps it once was, and Gigi de Mier, partner in Puerto Rico-based agency De Mier & Sainz de la Maza, suggests that this reality may be the result of diversity's positioning as a "token fill-in-the-blank issue" for many organizations.

"Diversity is a positive thing, but I don't want to be the token Hispanic," she says. "The goal [in hiring] should be having qualified candidates to choose from; any additional qualities they bring to the table should only be an added bonus. Besides, what does diversity really mean? Race? Ethnicity? It's very confusing." Even without a universal definition for diversity as it applies to hiring, the survey suggests that it is a priority for the majority of industry representatives, with 56 percent stating that senior management has specifically made diversity in hiring a core concentration of business goals. In addition, a healthy number of respondents take additional actions in checking the diversity box: 25 percent have an office just for diversity.

Given the amount of resources being funneled into diversity initiatives, it must be a priority to ensure that said resources are focusing on the goals with the most potential impact — and it's a no-brainer that the business goal that packs the biggest punch is a sturdy bottom line. With that in mind, as de Mier suggests, defining diversity is the first step; using it as value-add and not as a quota system is the second.

"Corporate America first needs to define diversity," she says. "Second, it must buy into the fact that you have to find the best person for the job. If it happens to be someone diverse, the best part is that they understand certain markets. It's a way to bridge misunderstanding."

PR News & Counselors Academy Diversity Survey

1. Do you feel diversity in hiring is a major issue within the PR industry today?
Yes 59%
No 41%
2. Do you feel that your company can be defined as a diverse workforce?
Yes 70%
No 30%

3. Has your senior management specifically made diversity in hiring a core concentration of your business goals?
Yes 56%
No 43%
No Response <1%
4. Does your company have a separate office relating solely to diversity?
No 74%
Yes 25%
No Response <1%
5. Does your company actively recruit new employees through job fairs designed to encourage diversity in the workforce?
No 56%
Yes 42%
No Response <1%
6. For your PR endeavors, does your office actively reach out to media outlets serving minority and/or ethnic audiences?
Yes 73%
No 26%
No Response <1%
7. For your PR endeavors, has your office translated press materials into other languages for distribution to minority and/or ethnic media outlets?
Yes 58%
No 41%
No Response <1%
8. Do you think diversity should be driven by the client-side and agencies/companies pressured to become more diverse?
No 56%
Yes 42%
No Response 2%
9. Will your agency/department be more diverse in 18 months than it is today?
No 49%
Yes 48%
No Response 2%

Employee Relations 911

Employer/employee relations are on shaky ground according to a Fall 2006 Watson Wyatt survey, which suggests that changes to pay, health care and retirement plans are negatively impacting recruitment, motivation and retaining key talent. Of the 1,110 workers surveyed (from 262 large U.S. companies across all industries), the following statistics were compiled:

- 71% of top-performing employees rank pay as one of the top three reasons they would leave an organization, but only 45 percent of employers believe pay is a top retention issue;
- 68% rate promotion opportunities as one of the top three reasons employees leave, closely followed by career development; and
- 63% of employers report a moderate or high level of difficulty in attracting critical-skill staff.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Litigation PR: Little Preparation = Big Crises

Television series like “Boston Legal” and “Law & Order” have a way of making courtroom drama seem sexy when, in reality, it’s just drama. The same is true for PR professionals who face litigation situations and who have to communicate with their employees and the public accordingly. A recent survey conducted by PR News and Medialink shows that, when it comes to litigation communication and crises, one startling trend remains consistent: Too large a percentage of senior PR execs are unprepared.

“[PR pros] think they can respond during just the verdict stage of litigation,” says Jeffrey Sindone, VP/senior counselor at Medialink. “They don’t realize the media cycle has already started without them.”

While many respondents (80%), polled from agencies, corporations and non-profits, claimed to have a media plan ready to be deployed at the earliest stages of pre-trial activity, a staggering 20% had a plan for the verdict stage only or, worse, no plan at all.

The trend of willy-nilly preparation during courtroom situations extends to media training for executives: 42% of respondents offered only indirect references to crisis situations or reputation management, while 10% provided none at all. PR managers, then, operate under the “better late than never” assumption, but that never is enough.

While print still is the primary media vehicle used by PR managers, there is an increasingly diverse mix of broadcast and new media as well. Using these alternatives to print enhances the ability to convey messages quickly and effectively throughout all stages of litigation.

Finally, it’s essential to remember that, though the verdict always is uncertain, legal proceedings follow a predictable formula of a beginning, a middle and an end. It’s both a blessing and a curse, though, when PR pros find themselves incommunicado.

“Communication professionals need to take advantage of the predictability,” Sindone says. “There’s no excuse not to have a plan.”

Litigation Communications Survey Results

1. How would you describe your own level of experience in handling PR related to a legal crisis?
 - Direct experience (handled one or more of the following duties: developed media strategy, functioned as corporate spokesman, worked directly with legal team): 80%
 - Indirect experience (in managing other PR activity for same organization, was briefed on potential impact of legal crisis): 12%
 - No experience: 8%
 - Print: 52%
 - Broadcast (radio and television) : 27%
 - Internet: 12%

- Other — (Sample) :9%
 - Blogs, bulletin boards
 - Direct communication with stakeholders, employees
 - Letter-writing campaigns, lobbying
 - Wire services feed all of the above so we focus on them
2. At which stage of litigation do you have a media plan ready to be deployed?
 - The earliest stages of pre-trial activity: 80%
 - At the verdict and judgment phase only: 7%
 - No media plan at all: 13%
 3. What part of your media training for executives offers specific instructions regarding litigation communications?
 - Specific and detailed instructions regarding comments about plaintiff, jury and defendant: 48%
 - Some indirect references to crisis situations or reputation management: 42%
 - None: 10%
 4. At which stage of litigation do you have a media plan ready to be deployed?
 - The earliest stages of pre-trial activity: 80%
 - At the verdict and judgment phase only: 7%
 - No media plan at all: 13%
 5. What part of your media training for executives offers specific instructions regarding litigation communications?
 - Specific and detailed instructions regarding comments about plaintiff, jury and defendant: 48%
 - Some indirect references to crisis situations or reputation management: 42%
 - None: 10%
 6. In media-training your executives, how much emphasis is placed on training for television and radio interviews versus print?
 - Equal (separate training for print vs. broadcast; instructions for broadcast interviews involve message delivery, body language and, if TV, wardrobe selection; training includes on-camera and in-studio rehearsals): 45%
 - Major (broadcast training is adapted for print; instructions for broadcast interviews involve message delivery, body language and, if TV, wardrobe selection; frequent on-camera and in-studio rehearsals) 29%
 - Minor (training for print interviews is adapted for broadcast; no technical preparation involved for in-studio or satellite interviews): 15%
 - None: 11%
 7. What methods of communication do you rely on to keep employees updated during litigation?
 - Briefing down through appropriate supervisory levels, with required presentations by supervisors to employees and handout materials. If there is a secure company intranet, establish an information page.
 - Broadcast e-mails and newsletter materials
 - It's disappointing, but sometimes the PR team is not any better informed on a potential legal crisis than the rest of the staff.

Disaster Response Trends

As authorities begin to assess the damage of Hurricane Rita (which interrupted the recovery from Hurricane Katrina), a new poll shows that Americans have more trust in private-sector companies than they do in the government when it comes to responding to disasters. The poll, commissioned by Boston-based Cone Inc., which specializes in cause branding, found that more than half of Americans believe companies should support relief-and-reconstruction efforts until all affected areas are thriving once again. The telephone-based survey of more than 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older also homed in on the best ways for companies to support relief efforts:

The BEST approach for companies to support relief efforts is to:	September 2005
Give cash to meet immediate needs	13%
Wait until real needs are identified and then apply business resources to support long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts	27%
Give cash in the short term and then apply business resources to support long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts	57%
Don't know	4%

Source: Cone Inc., September 2005

Getting in Shape for a Crisis

According to a Fortune magazine annual survey, 85% of communications managers from Fortune 1000 companies have a crisis plan in place, but less than one-third of them have ever tested it.

What's more, a 2004 Conference Board survey found that 70% of communications executives from the 1,000 largest companies in the United States don't think their senior management would react well to a financial crisis.

Steven Cody, managing partner of New York-based Peppercom, offered a checklist for getting in shape to handle crises. In brief, they are:

- Do a dry run-through: Simulating crises can help communications professionals anticipate potential snags.
- Divide and conquer: Divvying up responsibility to those most able to handle it — finance issues to the finance specialist, HR issues to the HR specialist — leaves no stone unturned; just scrambling to deal with the media means other key areas are going unprotected.
- Understand your constituents: Knowing how to handle external and internal audiences is essential in mitigating crises.
- Create a crisis response checklist: Collect contact info of key players, notify related branches/operations, prepare for the media and, once they arrive, do not speculate and do not drop the "no comment" bomb. "No comment is death in the world of crisis communications," Cody says. "You can win in the courtroom, but you can lose badly in the court of public opinion."

The PR director should be the go-to person for information in order to best control the story. This includes utilizing search engine optimization to make the company's Web site appear at the top of a search and updating said Web site at least twice a day with facts, not defenses.

"When you are explaining, you are losing," says Richard Levick from Levick Strategic Communications. "What we need to focus on is what key audiences need to hear. [In a crisis], their perception is our reality."

VNRs

VNR Challenge: Measuring Audiences, Getting Quality Airtime

When Doug Simon received the results of a survey in early 2006 co-sponsored by his company, DS Simon Productions, and PR News, there was one set of numbers that bothered him. When asked, "Have you ever received an audience number for a media outlet on a usage report that you felt might have been higher than it should have been?", 35% of the 400 PR professionals polled said yes, while 41% said no and 24% did not know.

What bothered Simon, whose New York-based company produces and distributes video and audio via satellite and hard copy to the broadcast media, was the 35% who felt their usage reports were padded. The problem, he feels, is not with the PR professionals receiving the usage reports, but with the often and unverifiable numbers these reports frequently contain.

"It would be ideal if the industry could agree on standards for reporting so every vendor, including the agencies, recorded audience numbers the same way," says Simon. "That would be a huge step forward for the public relations industry. Clearly identifying what type of station it is would be important, but sticking with the Nielsen methodology, which very clearly states the limits on the numbers you can claim for a station when Nielsen doesn't report an audience. And that is clearly what the core of the problem comes down to. If Nielsen doesn't report an audience, what should we put down? Everyone's putting different things across the board when in actuality they're entitled to put a very small number when Nielsen doesn't provide. One of the reasons we found such a high level of people stating they're receiving inflated numbers in their reports."

But what about the nearly one-quarter of polled PR practitioners who didn't know if their usage report numbers were over-inflated? Simon acknowledges many people view the reading of audience numbers as a mathematical science, but he adds there is no reason to be scared or confused by this numerical onslaught. "Nielsen has taken great steps to make things simple, with tools like their PeopleMeter," he says. "But not everyone is using that."

Indeed, Simon produced a usage report from a vendor trumpeting B-roll placement on a New York market independent TV station with a 110,000 audience. But the station's call letters might provoke confusion from anyone familiar with New York-area television: WVVH.

"It's a low power station out on South Hampton," explains Simon. "If you turn your TV sideways and tilt your TV antenna somewhat to the right, you might get it." Simon then adds PR practitioners who receive this kind of information need to ask hard questions about such reporting. "When you look at a usage report, check the familiarity with the programming and the station. Make sure your vendor provides you information with the affiliate and whether they are a broadcast, cable or low-power station. Check the individual audience total for the station and make sure it is not ending in multiples of a hundred or a thousand because that is very unlikely using Nielsen methodology. You can ask your vendor to provide proof, and Nielsen provides letters to all companies that they do work directly with Nielsen and have a contract and agreement."

The question of guaranteed placements generates a fair amount of passion from PR professionals. Referring to the aforementioned D.S. Simon-PR News survey question, David Patti, vice president of the health practice at the New York agency Makovsky + Company, notes: "It all depends on the source you're getting your numbers from. Some vendors are more truthful on numbers presented. I'm not a big fan of audience figures. By and large, I've had a hard time believing audience numbers from vendors. In one case, a vendor took a figure from a market of similar size and 'guesstimates' this is the audience number."

Effective PR Tool?

But as a PR tool, how effective are VNRs today? Patti believes they still possess some value, but time has not been their ally.

“They’ve certainly lost some of their cachet in the past few years,” he says. “For the right products, setting and timing, they can be effective. But overall, they have less value as a PR tool now than two or three years ago.”

Patti states the rise of the 24-hour news channels offered an excellent opportunity for VNRs to fill the considerable amounts of broadcast time that was initially available. “But now content providers have filled that gap,” he adds. “There are a plethora of choices for newsrooms. Besides, newsrooms have scaled back on their operations. So it’s a case of the boat and the dock missing each other.”

Taking the maritime analogy one step further is Shoba Purushothaman, president and CEO of The News Market, a broadcast news distribution service based in New York, who feels VNRs should literally be thrown overboard. “I am not a proponent of VNRs,” she says. “I think they fly in the face of logic. No credible journalist wants to use a VNR — they want to do their own work.”

Purushothaman is equally critical about guaranteed placements. “You don’t get guaranteed placements on top networks,” she states. “On cable, guaranteed placements are not seen as PR; it’s advertising.”

Purushothaman continues that she’s seen usage reports packed with obscure stations — “Cable companies I’ve never heard of, Channels 900 and above” — but she acknowledges some VNRs do get grand slam placement. “Sometime you get a rock star-tye of VNR that can fly due to the nature of who’s in it,” he says.

Or perhaps it is a matter who’s pitching it? Brooks Christol, corporate communications specialist at Healthways, Nashville, has registered VNR placements on CBS News, CNBC and MSNBC. For Christol’s success, high-profile hits came from understanding his mission and not leaving the pitching to a third party.

“You need to establish contact with the reporter or producer so they know when it is on the satellite for pick-up,” he explains. “Distribution services are a great way to get in front of the market, but they often lack personal relationships with targeted reporters and editors. Not all broadcast distribution companies hire telemarketers to pitch a story. When considering hiring these types of vendors, scrutinize the pitching strategies. I’ve worked with companies that take time to learn the story and will be effective at pitching. These companies have proven results without guaranteed placement. These are the vendors I recommend again and again.”

The personal touch helped Cheryl Kelly in her first VNR endeavor last August. Kelly, the public affairs specialist with the Washington, DC-based union AFSCME, coordinated a VNR of an AFSCME event honoring a slain Tennessee corrections officer. The ceremony took place at the union’s annual conference in Albuquerque, NM, but Kelly wanted to see coverage in the slain officer’s home state.

“I had to do a lot of calling and a little begging,” she recalls regarding her contact to the Tennessee television news stations. Kelly’s efforts paid off, with coverage throughout Tennessee and seven other states. “This was my first time doing it and it turned out to be really successful.”

Kelly credits her tenacity for getting the VNR shown so widely. "You have to be aggressive enough to call stations, dial continuously, and stay on it to get the story across," she advises. "And after the story was on the air, we got a lot of print requests. Newspapers wanted to get photographs and talk to our president about the story."

So perhaps, to steal from Mark Twain, the reports of the VNR's death is greatly exaggerated? Or maybe it is a case of knowing where they fit into today's PR scheme of things?

"We, as well as broadcasters, must understand the role of the VNR in the marketing mix," says Christol. "It is a tool to help reporters tell their story. PR should not expect the print media to run a press release verbatim, nor should we expect the broadcast media to run a VNR unedited. In our efforts to pitch these stories we should continuously offer other resources beyond the video and audio sent by satellite. Making the extra effort can help keep the valuable VNR in our toolbox and will also keep the broadcast media coming back."

Indeed, maybe the VNR is just getting bad PR. "The audience inflation problem could be contributing to the perception that VNRs aren't as effective," says Doug Simon. "The client may not work as hard to develop a story with strong news value because they may assume they are assured of reaching millions of viewers."

A Slice of VNR Practices

The DS Simon-PR News survey of 400 public relations professionals yielded additional insight regarding VNR usage and perceptions. Some of the data harvested from the survey included the following:

Q: Are you planning to include more public relations video in your campaigns for 2006 than you did in 2005?

Yes	8%
Less	12%
The Same	46%
Don't Know	34%

Q: Given the more competitive media environment, have you changed your approach to try and offer more compelling, less commercial PR video stories to the media?

Yes	40%
Not necessary	46%
Don't know	14%

Q: If you work in corporate PR, how do you coordinate your VNR programs?

Work directly with the VNR firm	27%
Have agency handle the entire process	23%
Work with both the agency and vendor	50%

Top PR Endeavors of All Time

The Top 10 PR Endeavors: 250 Years Of Tylenol, Tea And Teddy Bears

The history of our nation is marked by triumphs, defeats, scandals and moments of stunning poise in the economy, business, technology, culture, politics and ... PR?

To tip our hats to communications efforts of yore that lay buried in textbooks and handbooks and guidebooks, PR News recently conducted a survey asking readers to select what they consider to be the greatest PR endeavor from a list that spans our young nation's lifetime. And the results? While no corner of history was left uninfluenced by the tenets of public relations (or whatever its earliest incarnation would have been called), the crowning achievement was voted (from a pool of 400 respondents) to be...

The Tylenol Tampering Crisis

When seven Chicago-area people died in 1982 after ingesting what was discovered to be Tylenol laced with cyanide, the PR team of parent company Johnson & Johnson hit the streets to put the crisis to bed. Executives took aggressive measures to investigate the incidents, all of which could be traced to five bottles that had been tampered with after being placed on store shelves (three other compromised bottles were eventually found).

Despite the fact that tampering occurred in post-manufacturing phases, J&J still issued a nationwide product recall and halted all production and advertising — moves that garnered widespread praise in the media for their resolve and admirable social responsibility. To this day, crisis communicators follow the case study like a roadmap, referring to then-CEO James Burke's application of the J&J credo in every facet of recovery. That attention to the company's first responsibility — "doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use [our] products and services" — set a standard for crisis management. And, though J&J went from a 35 percent to an 8 percent market share directly following the incident, it recovered within a year thanks to the PR team's rebranding initiatives.

Ever since the Johnson & Johnson brand turned the deaths of seven people into an example of quintessential crisis communications, the company has been immortalized in textbooks, case study guidebooks and best-practice guidelines. That notoriety continues among PR News' readers, 23 percent of whom ranked it the greatest PR endeavor of all time. But the list goes on to include less obvious initiatives that did more to shape the public relations landscape than anyone could ever imagine.

For starters, the Boston Tea Party slides into second place, with 20 percent of respondents deeming it the most noteworthy PR endeavor. Likely not planned as such, the 1773 Tea Party went down in history as arguably the first large-scale publicity stunt. After all, a PR practitioner today would be hard-pressed to coordinate the dumping of 342 crates of tea into the Boston Harbor (legal issues notwithstanding).

Thus, according to reader respondents, America's earliest years provided PR fodder for centuries to come. Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" ranked fourth due to its exemplary political communications that resonated with a national audience; The Federalist Papers also scored well for the distribution of syndicated opinion pieces via available media outlets. A bit later, in 1903, the "Teddy Bear" as we know it today was born as a promotion tool for President

Teddy Roosevelt's conservation efforts and sense of fairness; ranking eighth among reader respondents, it may be the best example of brand strength and longevity (even if most don't know the source, it's name has certainly stuck around).

But perhaps most indicative of current PR professionals' attention to creativity and off-the-beaten-path opportunities is the list of write-ins that accompanied many respondent submissions. Among them:

- Claiming Saddam Hussein was linked to the 9/11 terrorist attacks disseminated a message of clear-and-present danger to an entire nation
- Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast (1938) demonstrated the power of mass media in influencing public opinion
- Moses' reading of the Ten Commandments relayed a message of Biblical proportions
- Cabbage Patch Kids hit the marketplace in 1982, and research showed that the product launch was based solely on "adoption events" and public relations activities, with no advertising in the mix
- The damage control surrounding Dan Quayle's 1992 grade-school gaffe, when he publicly corrected a 12-year-old boy's spelling of "potato" by claiming it had an "e" at the end, was an image patrol of monumental (not to mention embarrassing) proportions

The "Top PR Endeavor of All Time" reader survey indicates that, while executive buy-in and quantitative measurement tools are figments of modern PR's increasingly realized imagination, PR as a concept has driven many momentous movements — and historic downfalls — that predate even our country.

Readers Respond: The Top 10 PR Endeavors Of All Time

1. The Tylenol Crisis (1982): The news of deaths related to product tampering has become a case study in how a major brand forcefully dealt with a crisis through focused and mature communications. (23 percent)
2. The Boston Tea Party (1773): Arguably the first American publicity stunt, white colonists dressed up as Indians to throw British tea shipments into Boston Harbor as a protest to repressive taxation. (20 percent)
3. The Fireside Chats (1933): President Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio addresses to the American public provided a direct communications approach that both bypassed the media and became a media event. (19 percent)
4. Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" (1776): The self-published call for American independence was the first example of political communications resonating with a national audience. (11 percent)
5. The Office of War Information (1942): This federal agency worked with the media and the entertainment industry to build public support of America's military efforts during WWII, most notably in its use of Hollywood filmmakers to create frontline documentaries. (10 percent)
6. The Beatles Arrive in America (1964): The aggressive promotional campaigns hyped a hitherto-unknown British rock band's appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show," resulting in one of the most significant cultural events of the century. (7 percent)
7. Ivy Lee's "Declarations of Principles" (1906): The PR pioneer's widely distributed manifesto marked the first open statement that public relations practitioners had public responsibilities extending beyond their client obligations. (7 percent)

8. The Teddy Bear (1903): Naming the stuffed doll after President Theodore Roosevelt (several sources take credit for this) proved to be a PR honeypot for Roosevelt, whose supporters used it in promoting his conservation efforts and sense of fairness (the connection came because he allegedly refused to shoot a baby bear). (7 percent)
9. The Federalist Papers (1787-88): A series of articles written by three men (Hamilton, Madison, Jay) under a single pen name laid the groundwork for distributing syndicated opinion pieces via the media while taking a local issue (New York's ratification of the Constitution) to a level of national debate. (6 percent)
10. The First PR Agency (1900): An aptly named company called The Publicity Firm created a new industry by focusing its efforts solely on the art and science of public relations. (6 percent)

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