

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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As Media Continues to Fragment, Communications Pros Take Note

Funnyman Jay Leno's recent announcement that he's leaving his late-night throne for a prime-time spot on NBC has all media buzzing about the move's larger implications. After all, it's the first show of its kind to land in prime time—usually real estate reserved for sitcom or drama behemoths

(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn in This Week's Issue of PR News

1. 25% of surveyed communications executives reported using more social media in 2008 than in 2007. (p. 6)
2. If you are being interviewed for a podcast, try to create "word pictures," or verbal descriptions that paint a distinct picture to reinforce your message. (p. 7)
3. When dealing with employees, never respond to "why?" with "because I said so." (p. 8)
4. Not all media is good media, even in the context of aggressive media outreach efforts. (p. 5)
5. 59% of survey respondents believe a green investment would generate a rate of return similar to any other fund. (p. 3)
6. More than one in five surveyed companies plan to make layoffs in the next 12 months. (p. 3)
7. To improve ROI in today's economy, boost the effectiveness of PR dollars already being spent instead of cutting back. (p. 2)

like *Friends*, *Seinfeld* and *CSI*—signaling (or, more likely, reaffirming) a drastic shift in the way we consume media.

Indeed, media's fragmentation and the growth of digital platforms is redefining television, with industry executives looking for ways to override the powers that DVR technologies and downloaded Web videos grant viewers to digest content (and bypass advertisements) at their leisure. The results of a joint survey conducted

by *PR News* and **DS Simon Productions** reflect this reality in the context of business communications, revealing an ever-interesting use among public relations executives of channels like online video, social media and blogs to reach and influence target audiences (see page 6 for full results).

"In 2008 the PR community began to understand the need for online video and social media. The survey predicts unprecedented growth in

the use of these tools in 2009 despite the economy. [For example,] more than two out of three PR pros rated some type of Web video their most important video need for 2009," says Doug Simon, president and CEO of DS Simon Productions. "They recognize where the ROI is."

Online video, social media and blogs consistently comprised the top three platforms that executives most depended

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Media Training

Social Media

Media Relations

Preparing Executives for the Always-On World of Social Media Training

With the emergence of social media, executives have to be ready to face cameras and microphones at all times when they are in public. It is not enough to be prepared for a face-to-face interview across a desk or a table with a journalist who is taking notes on paper or on a laptop or PDA. These days the journalists or bloggers may want to podcast the interview or audiotape it to use in a blog post. They also may be carrying a video camera and could ask to tape the executive on the fly while he or she is answering questions. Broadcast training is great for planned studio opportunities, but it doesn't cover all contingencies in this new world.

Once they have their gen-

eral content ready, here are some general tips to make your spokespeople comfortable with the new types of interviews in the social media world:

▶ **Always be ready for your close-up:** Even if there has been no suggestion of the inclusion of any multimedia, an executive should always be dressed and groomed for a photograph or video clip. Just as executives dress well for their customer meetings, they should do the same for interviews.

▶ **Ask for what you need to make you comfortable during an interview:** If PR is with you, they will handle getting you a glass of water for a lengthy podcast interview so your voice

is not strained. If you are alone, feel free to ask for water, or even hot tea, if warm liquid will help you be more comfortable while speaking. If someone does bring out a camera, ask for time to check your appearance. Interviews may be somewhat stressful, but they are not intended to be painful surprise attacks.

▶ **Remember the "do-over":** Unless a podcast, videocast or videoblog is live, it is always acceptable to stop and start over. Sometimes a spokesperson answers a question and then realizes there is a better or more concise or colorful way to phrase something. Maybe you had a great sound bite and you

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► How To...

Brand Marketing

Measurement

Improve ROI in a Tough Economy

It's an unfortunate reality of business: When the economy takes a turn for the worse, marketing, advertising and public relations are among the first budget items businesses cut. But in tough economic times, it's more important than ever to get business-building marketing messages out there.

In fact, difficult economies actually create singular opportunities to reexamine spending and redirect marketing efforts toward tools that maximize return on investment. When competitors withdraw their messages from the marketplace, smart businesses ramp up their marketing efforts to capture greater market share.

So what are some winning strategies to improve ROI for PR efforts during tough economic times? Here are two quick tips to get you started:

- Instead of cutting back on budgets, boost the effectiveness of the PR dollars already being spent.
- Look for tools that are effective and that offer easily quantifiable, measurable results to make a case for continuing the successful tactics—and therefore budgets to support them.

Traditional marketing efforts like print and online PR and advertising will continue to play a role in an overall smart marketing strategy. However, next-generation online marketing tools like pay-per-click advertising, direct e-mail and brand storytelling through lifestyle-type articles can yield higher ROI. What's more, online marketing spending is increasing, even during this period of historic economic uncertainty. Research groups including **Forrester**, **Jupiter Communications Inc.**, **Zenith Optimedia** and **European Information Technology**

Observatory all predict continued, significant growth of online marketing in the future. PR pros can use this positive trend to their advantage.

Creating a mix of the best of several marketing disciplines serves to strengthen a campaign's deliverables. The old days of treating advertising, interactive and PR like separate entities are over. Today, the most effective tactics are the ones that blend the branding value of advertising, the credibility of PR and the measurability/ROI of online tactics.

Brand storytelling in particular can help marketers reach prospects that are not necessarily already looking for what the company has to offer. Brand storytelling relies on time-proven public relations techniques, like compelling headlines and well-crafted, informational copy, to actually generate interest in prospects. Further, their appearance as third-party reporting in trusted media lends credibility to the marketer's message.

Brand storytelling not only builds brand identity in the minds of consumers, it can actually create interest in the products or services of the sponsor. As PR professionals well know, in terms of building brand recognition, an article in a credible news medium can generate greater impact than an advertising blitz.

Here are four tips for building an integrated campaign that incorporates the best of PR (credibility), advertising (branding) and online (measurability) to help boost ROI during tough economic times:

► **Consider using hybrid tactics.** These days, tactics don't need to be exclusively PR-centric. Consider using proven tactics that blend the control and measurability of advertising with the credibility

of PR, like matte releases or brand-focused Web articles that drive traffic to clients' sites on a cost-per-click basis. The pay-for-performance model of Web brand storytelling drives measurable results, while the editorial style of the medium makes the message much more credible and effective.

► **Outline your objectives and costs.** Set clear and measurable goals and determine a maximum allowable marketing cost per inquiry before you move forward. Then, keep an eye out for tactics that allow you to establish spending limits up front, and monitor those costs as the campaign unfolds.

► **Bob and weave as you go.** Don't worry about launching the "perfect" campaign. The Web is an excellent medium for making adjustments as you go. Establish a baseline before you begin, and work to improve upon your current results. Then, during the next campaign, make further improvements.

► **Measure and assess.** Traditional PR campaigns tend to rely on old-fashioned measurements like circulation. Many of today's tactics are far more measurable, allowing you to track response down to the smallest bits of information. But don't overdo it. You can measure nearly everything, but do you need to? Focus on the actionable data that you can use to improve your campaign. Use the data you gather to make decisions about next steps, and redirect resources toward the most effective tactics. **PRN**

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Freezing Months for Talent Management; Green Investments; Blind Eye Turned to Corporate Misconduct

► **It's a People Business, But...:** Despite the tough economy and widespread layoffs, recruiting and retaining top talent remains a top concern for employers, according to a survey released by **Robert Half International**. Among the findings:

- When asked about their top staffing concern, 39% of respondents cited retention;
- 22% said recruitment;
- 17% said productivity; and,
- 17% said staff morale.

The communications implication: Business is still about people, and organizations are only as strong as their weakest employee. When money is tight, the best strategy is to embrace nontraditional recruitment techniques and creative fringe benefits—two things the modern communications executive is well equipped to drive.

But another survey released by **Watson Wyatt** paints a dismal picture in the context of HR and hiring, revealing that the number of companies implementing cost-cutting measures, including layoffs, hiring and salary freezes and smaller pay raises, has risen sharply in just two months. Included in the findings:

- More than one in five surveyed companies (23%) planned to make layoffs in the next 12 months, and almost two in five (39%) had already done so—a sharp increase from only 19% of companies that had done so in October;
- The number of companies with hiring freezes jumped from 30% in October to 47% in December, with an additional 18% planning a hiring freeze in the next 12 months;
- The number of companies that have already implemented salary freezes jumped from 4% in October to 13% in early December;
- Those companies that have already made or are planning to make layoffs indicated that this strategy would affect approximately 5% of their employee population; and,
- 61% of employers reduced their planned merit increase for next year from 3.8% to 2.5%.

Source: Robert Half International and Watson Wyatt

► **Investors Still Seeing Green:** Even while citing a down economy and concerns about the Earth's ecosystem, business owners continue to be optimistic about giving to environmental causes, according to a sur-

vey released by **SunTrust Bank Private Wealth Management**. Notable findings include:

- 59% of those surveyed believed that a green investment would generate a rate of return similar to any other fund;
- 45% agreed that a motivating factor in green investing is business owners' belief that the Earth's environment is slowly deteriorating;
- Nearly half said their company had an official green policy that included recycling, energy saving plans and other measures;
- 88% lent financial support only to environmental organizations they have researched thoroughly; and,
- 72% gave only to environmental organizations that are "well established."

Source: SunTrust Bank

► **Desperation Drives Corporate Malfeasance:** A study from **KPMG LLP** found that pressure to do "whatever it takes" to achieve business goals continues as the primary driver behind corporate fraud and misconduct, regardless of this malfeasance's impact on public trust. Among the findings:

- 74% of surveyed employees

said they had personally observed misconduct within their organizations during the prior 12 months;

- 46% reported that what they observed "could cause a significant loss of public trust if discovered";
- 72% of those whose companies had no formal ethics and compliance program reported having observed misconduct during the previous year; meanwhile, at companies with ethics and compliance programs, 55% of respondents reported witnessing wrongful activity;
- Among those to whom respondents said they would be comfortable reporting misconduct are local managers (61%), peers (57%), HR (57%), hotline (57%), legal department (52%), senior executives (43%), internal audit (40%) and board members (32%);
- While 89% of the survey respondents said they would be "doing the right thing" to report an incident, some 34% suggested a lack of confidence that appropriate action would be taken; and,
- Only 47% believed those involved would be appropriately disciplined, no matter their position.

Source: KPMG LLP

PR News' Going Green: Outstanding Green Business Practices

"It's Not Easy Being Green" —Kermit the Frog

From the publisher of PR News, this 200+ page guidebook includes profiles of blue chip companies, small organizations and start-ups that have reinvented or reconfigured their businesses to be more environmentally responsible. The guidebook is tailored to communications, marketing and senior executives looking for a blueprint to communicate existing green efforts or to get new initiatives off the ground.

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Democratizing Corporate Governance: Aflac Wins Shareholder Support by Giving Them a ‘Say on Pay’

Company: Aflac
Agency: Fleishman-Hillard
Timeframe: 2007-2008

The American Family Life Insurance Company (Aflac) may be best known in the consumer marketplace for its quirky, quacky duck mascot, but the insurance giant made a different type of impression on the investor community with its “Say on Pay” initiative.

The idea began germinating in 2006, when some shareholders inquired about voting on executive compensation practices—a highly controversial topic that has come under a great deal of scrutiny in recent years. What followed the shareholders’ initial inquiry would become a historic moment in the context of corporate governance.

DEMOCRATIZING SHAREHOLDER RELATIONS GRANTS POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Around the same time shareholders began getting restless about executive compensation practices at public companies, Aflac’s communications team was charged with reinforcing the company’s rationale for its own compensation practices, as well as its pay-for-performance commitment, to the investor community via business media.

This effort centered on Aflac CEO Dan Amos’ decision to give shareholders a “Say on Pay,” inviting them to vote on the management’s practices. It was an unprecedented gesture of transparency. The only problem: In order for the vote to be a success for Aflac’s reputation, the results

had to be overwhelmingly in favor of the company’s management. Thus, the communications team, along with professionals at agency-partner **Fleishman-Hillard**, had its work cut out for it.

The “Say on Pay” vote was set to take place on May 5, 2008, giving Aflac executives just over a year to:

- Convey to investors that the company’s executive compensation program was fair and appropriate;
- Link the company’s positive performance to its current leadership;
- Sustain media coverage of Aflac’s “Say on Pay” from the February 2007 announcement to the May 2008 vote; and,

‘Messages targeting investors are, in effect, targeting the brightest, most knowledgeable portion of a company’s audience.’ —Jon Sullivan, Executive Publicist/External Comms, Aflac

- Leverage the “Say on Pay” issue to extend the company’s credentials as an ethical company committed to corporate governance.

But these objectives came with their fair share of poten-

tial land mines.

“The ‘Say on Pay’ initiative presented risk to the controversy about executive compensation, as Aflac might be perceived as telling CEOs of other large corporations what to do,” says Jon Sullivan, Aflac’s executive publicist/external communications, identifying the initiative’s additional challenges as “remaining sensitive to the implications of speaking out on a controversial issue, [managing] logistics associated with being headquartered in a small city [Columbus, Georgia] and ensuring primary spokespersons were on message.”

WINNING THE HEARTS OF A TOUGH CROWD

The challenges the communications team was facing were certainly not inconsequential, and the subsequent strategies developed to overcome them would need to incorporate a number of functional areas: media relations, investor relations, risk management and, potentially, crisis communications.

With that in mind, the communications executives ramped up a robust outreach strategy that hinged on the very crux of “Say on Pay” itself: transparency.

The team negotiated unprecedented access to the CEO for select media, including **CBS** and **NBC**, for which Amos appeared to reinforce the “Say on Pay” messages.



Media outreach surrounding Aflac’s “Say on Pay” initiative garnered national coverage.

The executives also referred reporters to pertinent shareholder activists—typically among the greatest critics of corporate governance—to provide a counterintuitive perspective on the story. Efforts like these both underscored Aflac’s unusual move to invite voting on executive compensation and revealed its intrinsic ethical approach to the issue, all to an audience that is traditionally very critical and skeptical.

“The targeted audience for our message was primarily the business community,” Sullivan says. “Secondary audiences included potential and current Aflac shareholders and institutions that hold approximately two-thirds stake in Aflac.”

VULNERABILITY BREEDS OPPORTUNITY, NOT CONTEMPT

Once Aflac opened its doors to these audiences, it conducted proactive media outreach and, even more important, it armed Amos with various talking points that justified the fairness of the company’s compensation. For example:

- From the time Amos became CEO in August

1990 through December 2007, Aflac's total return to shareholders exceeded 3,435%, compared to the 660% average for the **Dow Jones Industrial Average** and 510% for **S&P 500**.

- During the same period, the company's market value grew from \$1.2 billion to \$30.5 billion.
- Total revenues grew from \$2.7 billion in 1990 to \$15.4 billion in 2007.
- Amos helped grow Aflac's market capitalization from \$1.3 billion to \$29 billion. Translation: If someone purchased 100 shares in the company 17 years ago, they paid \$1,600. Today, the shares would be worth nearly \$45,000.

These numbers made a compelling argument when Amos faced the media, but the team also equipped him with information to address the story in a broader context; after all, media are almost unanimously more inclined to tell a story that supports a trend or larger news hook.

As for the specific media targeted, Sullivan says, "The campaign consisted primarily of traditional print and electronic earned media. However, we did target the emerging

BEST PRACTICES FOR LAUNCHING AN IR INITIATIVE

When asked to recommend best practices to communications professionals who are planning an IR or financial communications campaign, Jon Sullivan, Aflac's executive publicist/external communications, offered the following tips:

- **Ensure a cohesive message:** Messages targeting investors are, in effect, targeting the brightest, most knowledgeable portion of a company's audience. It stands to reason that they have the most interest in knowing about the company, its practices and its culture, meaning that mixed or incomplete messages will be greeted with concern about the direction of the campaign. It is imperative that the primary media spokespeople be on the same page with regard to the message.
- **Ensure the message is appropriate:** Aflac CEO Dan Amos maintains a steadfast policy of speaking with shareholders and listening to what they have to say. The key to an effective IR campaign is to ensure that the investors are part of the solution. Aflac was very careful to include shareholder activists in the communications initiative, and as a result, add third-party credibility to the communication.
- **Consider your medium:** Not all media is good media. At times it is in the best interests of a company to weigh reputational risk based on the track record of a particular journalist or publication. Be prepared to be selective about spokesperson access, and endure the possible consequences, in exchange for an outcome that is favorable overall. Oftentimes the medium, though it might be substantial, is not the appropriate forum for the message. It is wise to consider these factors when determining which publications are desirable and which you are better off bypassing. Also note that the status of whether a medium is appropriate or not can and often will change during the course of a campaign.

channels of communication, including Webcasts on Newsweek.com, Businessweek.com and ABCnews.com. These Internet-based mediums provided the ability to reach a variety of audiences, many of whom are more tech-savvy and desire information fast in a faster-paced information society."

TALLYING THE VOTES ON ELECTION DAY

When it came time for shareholders to cast their votes on May 5, 2008, they had more than enough reminders that

Aflac is committed to fairness and transparency. The media coverage was significant—more than 350 million impressions, and a \$4 million ad value—but the real coup came with the shareholders' decision: 93% voted to affirm Aflac's executive compensation, with only 2% voting against it.

In short, Aflac won the support of the investor community by a landslide (not to mention the 2008 *PR News* Platinum PR Award in the Financial/Investor Relations category), at the same time

becoming the first public company in the United States to permit a shareholder vote on the issue.

According to Sullivan, "While the issue of 'Say on Pay' was fairly straightforward, the company was diligent in its efforts in being as concise and clear as possible to deliver the message: Aflac listens to its shareholders."

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PR NEWS' CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY GUIDEBOOK



PR News' second edition of the **Guide to Best Practices in Corporate Social Responsibility** includes a diverse set of ideas from business thought leaders around the globe. There is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for CSR, and therein lies your challenge. In these 200+ pages, you will find strategies and tactics that can be put to work in your organization. The challenge then will be in knowing which ones to choose.

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Online Video Survey Results

► Page 1

on in the past, and that they will most actively implement more in the future. When asked what areas of Web 2.0 they are looking to actively use for their organization or their clients, execs ranked the top three within fractions of one another (77.2% blogs, 71.7% video and 70.3% social media).

PR pros seem confident in these channels' value to their overall communications strate-

gies, though their belief in the degree of importance remains somewhat hesitant: When asked how important it is to reach Web influencers as part of their earned media strategies, only 27.2% said "extremely" important, with 39.6% and 30.2% saying "important" and "somewhat important," respectively. Perhaps that is because the effective implementation of these platforms is still a chal-

lenge for many professionals, especially as more and more look to create and execute strategies in-house.

"With more than half of those responding looking to create the ability to generate the content in-house, they are going to be looking for support to get the content in circulation online," Simon says.

For agency executives, this means equipping inter-

nal teams with the skill sets needed not just to create compelling content for online audiences, but to physically get that content on the appropriate Web channel in the most effective and visually appealing way. Many firms have already done this by hiring professionals with experience in computer programming or video production.

Another option for those without the budget to hire a full-time expert: Invest in basic training, or partner with other organizations that possess the capabilities you don't (just be sure you can bring something to the table, too, or clients will flock to them and them alone).

Another noteworthy survey finding is the importance of different types of media Web sites to earned media strategies: 76.7% cited newspaper Web sites, closely followed by Web media such as **MSN, Yahoo News, About.com** and **WebMD** (75.7%). Magazine, television station and radio station Web sites trailed with 66.8%, 47.5% and 36.1%, respectively.

Regardless of your intentions for Web 2.0 platforms within earned media strategies in 2009, these results, coupled with news headlines like Leno's move to prime time, reinforce the ever-changing consumption habits of audiences. Failing to adapt will mean failure in no uncertain terms. It's just a matter of how quickly and painfully that failure comes.

"Online video and other social media tools aren't a luxury add-on anymore," says Simon. "They are at the center of successful PR initiatives."

PRN

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PR News/DS Simon Online Video Survey

1. What areas of Web 2.0 are you looking to actively use for your organization or your clients?

Blogs	77.2%
Online video	71.7%
Social media	70.3%
Podcast/vodcasts	58.4%
Webcasts.....	54.5%
Twitter.....	44.1%
Video blogs	24.3%
Internet media tours.....	23.8%
No response/other	3.4%

2. Are you using these tools internally or externally?

Both.....	52.0%
Externally.....	42.6%
Internally.....	4.0%
No response.....	1.5%

3. How important is it to reach Web influencers as part of your earned media strategy?

Important.....	39.6%
Somewhat important.....	30.2%
Extremely important.....	27.2%
Not important at all.....	3.0%

4. Which of the following are important to your earned media strategy?

Newspaper Web sites	76.7%
Web media (MSN, Yahoo News, About.com, WebMD, etc.)	75.7%
Magazine Web sites	66.8%
TV station Web sites	47.5%
Radio station Web sites	36.1%
None of the above	1.9%

5. What ways do you think online video can be most effective as a communications tool?

Direct to consumer communications	60.9%
B2B	20.3%
As an internal/training tool	17.8%
No response	1.0%

6. Are you looking to create the ability to

utilize Web 2.0 in-house, or partner with an outside resource?

In-house	53.0%
Work with a consultant to set it up, and give me the tools to then do it in-house.....	24.8%
Outside resource	21.8%
No response	0.5%

7. Which of the following did you utilize more this past year than in 2007?

Social media	55.4%
Blogs	52.5%
Online video	48.5%
Podcasts/vodcasts.....	28.2%
Twitter	26.7%
Webcasts.....	19.3%
Video blogs	9.4%
Internet media tours	4.5%
No response/other	3.1%

8. Which of the following will you be including in your 2009 communications plans?

Blogs	74.3%
Online video	72.3%
Social media.....	71.3%
Webcasts.....	51.5%
Podcasts/vodcasts.....	49.5%
Twitter.....	45.0%
Video blogs	28.7%
Internet media tours.....	21.8%
No response/other	2.5%

9. What will be your most important need for video in 2009?

Online video	27.7%
Viral campaign.....	21.8%
Corporate communications.....	13.4%
Targeted placement.....	7.4%
Earned Web media.....	6.9%
Webcasts.....	5.4%
Video blogs	4.5%
Internal communications.....	3.5%
Earned broadcast media.....	2.5%
No response/other	6.9%

Source: PR News/DS Simon. Based on 202 responses.

Social Media Training

► Page 1

forgot to use it. It is fine to ask the interviewer to do a second take. They can edit it later and make it seamless. This “right” should not be abused, but it can be invoked when it is really needed. The interviewer typically reviews this approach with the spokesperson in advance.

► **Be natural on camera, but limit gesturing:** Good body language—erect, but not stiff—is always good in any type of interview, filmed or otherwise. The speaker always projects more energy when sitting upright. The same holds true for a calm, but positive expression. You don’t want to say, “We’re pleased with our results” while your face looks as if you are being led to your execution.

► **Confirm where the interviewer would like you to look—at them or at the camera:** We’ve found that the more natural approach is to engage the

interviewer directly and ignore the camera, but you want to make sure you won’t seem like you have your side to the audience when the video is shown.

► **If you naturally use your hands when you talk, be aware that this may seem exaggerated on camera:** Natural but muted gestures on camera are best; the camera typically is focused on your face anyway.

► **If the interview is being taped, do not play to the tape recorder:** Try an experiment. Lean your elbows on the table in front of your speaker, cup your face with your hands and call one of your colleagues to tell them something you are excited about. Then check to see if they have caught your excitement. Chances are they have not, as your energy level automatically goes down when you slouch and speak to the phone this way.

► **It is always best to have the same erect posture regardless of whether the interviewer is across from you or across the country:** If a podcast is being taped remotely, have a colleague sit in the room with you and talk to him or her as you answer questions. If you are being filmed remotely while the interviewer is on the phone, talk to the cameraperson or a colleague in the room as they film you. You will come across more natural and with more energy than if you just focus on the camera and talk to the disembodied voice of the interviewer.

► **Warm up the audience before you proceed:** If someone wants to tape or film you, buy yourself the time you need to center yourself by engaging them socially in conversation. They want the podcast or video to be good, so it helps them to get a sense of you before

they turn their equipment on. Another trick we have recommended over the years is to do a minute or so of deep breathing before interviews. This naturally relaxes you and also slows you down when you begin speaking.

Faced with these new social media interview opportunities, the executive spokesperson who will reap the most rewards are the ones who have taken these steps to prepare and have added one more skill to their kit bag—flexibility. *PRN*

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This article was excerpted from the forthcoming *PR News 2008 Media Training Guidebook*. It was written by Michael Parker, senior manager, Lois Paul & Partners. To order this or any *PR News* guidebook, visit www.prnewsonline.com/store/.

WHAT TO DO IF IT'S A PODCAST INTERVIEW

Make it an interesting conversation: The best podcasts are short, informative and sound like an interesting conversation between individuals you would like to learn more about. Before your first meeting [to prepare an executive for an interview], listened to a podcast he/she has done. In addition to learning his/her views about business and competitive positions, you’ll get a sense of who he/she is as a person, including if he/she has a great sense of humor.

Create word pictures: Think of good anecdotes or analogies that will make the podcast interesting and help listeners create word pictures in their heads as they tune into the interview. Prepare in advance with the interviewer as national talk show guests do. Tell them what stories you can share and get their feedback, as well as requests for areas they want to cover.

Keep it short and punchy: Don’t use one-word answers, but also be conscious not to hog the microphone. Overly long answers will be edited down. Self-editing and conciseness will make sure your points are conveyed clearly, as you presented them.

Know your facts: Have facts and figures available to you, in case you’ll need them, along with any data or customer references you are able to cite. This way you can provide valuable proof points while you keep the conversation moving.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU KNOW YOU'LL BE ON CAMERA

Be ready: In addition to being well-groomed, plan in advance for sound bites—short, pithy statements that show passion or “net it out” for the viewer—that will be great on camera. As in a podcast, be sure to speak at a normal conversational pace. This is not a race. Slow down so you are articulate and clear.

Relax your face before the video begins: You don’t have to smile the whole time. Depending on the subject, a too-ready smile can seem fake or even inappropriate. Smiling with your eyes makes you more approachable on camera. It helps you project confidence, candor, energy and a real passion for your subject. Think about the best cocktail party conversation you have had recently and recreate the business version of that for the camera.

Get comfortable before filming begins: If the interview is being filmed on a trade show floor, for example, and you are not sitting, assume a comfortable stance so you are not shifting your weight or swaying while you talk. If possible, use a chair or trade show booth counter to brace yourself while you are chatting (but no white knuckles, please). Don’t step too close to the camera. Some of the worst videos look like the person is about to attack the videographer.

Do a test run: Prep for an on-the-fly video interview by doing a mock interview that simulates this type of scenario. For example, a reporter recognizes you in a cab line at a trade show by your name tag or logo on your briefcase and asks you about your company. The way you would speak with this person, convey concise information and leave them asking for a follow-up sit-down interview is the way you want to handle this type of video Q&A.

For PR Pros, Are Rules Made To Be Broken?



“Rules are for other people.”

That’s what my father told me just before Christmas, when I questioned the legitimacy of his prime curbside parking spot in front of a shopping center packed with last-minute shoppers. He was joking (sort of), but the comment had a peculiar sense of poignancy given the times we face in the earliest moments of 2009, as we look ahead at 360-odd days of almost-certain chaos. And I’m not implying that my dad operates under some anarchic, Blagojevichian philosophy (he acknowledges the difference between rules and laws).

But business—and the business of PR—might benefit from some maverick-style pushing of comfort zones. In many ways it already has, what with the increasingly accepted revisionist approach to communicating and engaging with stakeholders in untraditional (read: digital) ways. True, improvements have been made, but the status quo remains. What’s more, the main sticking point to leaders’ willingness to embrace change remains the same: fear of losing control.

Well, if 2008 taught us anything, it’s that control is long gone (and, for the most forward-thinking execs, already forgotten). The best thing leaders can do for themselves, their organizations and their stakeholders now is to cease clinging to the last wisps of corporate hegemony. That’s one of the reasons I wanted to step out from behind my editorial curtain for the length of one column to give my perspective on the proverbial state of the union, having spent many hours gathering intelligence from industry leaders. Most of my thoughts have some connection to my dad’s words of “wisdom,” if only in the sense that they suggest that many old-fashioned (and even new-

fashioned) rules are hindering execs and organizations’ evolution. So, without further ado ...

ON DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

I could write an entire book on this topic (and I did), but it’s worth condensing the topic into a few key points. Many executives still fall back on traditional communications techniques—one-way delivery of force-fed messages—because there are rules attached to them. The conversational approach to engaging stakeholders via digital media seems lawless. “Bloggers don’t have the training to be considered legitimate news sources!”

“Consumer-generated media has corrupted the high standards of journalism!” “People can say whatever they want about my client/company, even if it’s not true!”

The hardest part about this situation is that the solution is simple, but people are often too afraid to speak honestly and risk seeming mean. But I’ll take one for the team and state the solution in no uncertain terms: Get. Over. It.

If you are still dwelling on the fear that your brand will be demolished by the rules-don’t-apply style of modern communications, then you’ve missed the point entirely. You can’t change the inevitable effect of digital platforms on your business; you can, however, take comfort in the fact that online communications is self-correcting. If there is no truth in something, it usually fades. The best safeguard is a strong reputation, and that doesn’t always come from following the anachronistic rules of conduct.

ON TALENT MANAGEMENT

Generational conflicts are one of the biggest catalysts for the rapidly changing talent management landscape. Specifically,

as Millennials move up the corporate ranks into management positions, their idiosyncrasies are permeating corporate cultures. Impatient, entitled, demanding, talented, creative and hard working, these employees are the illegitimate children of opportunity and angst. They want the world, but they also don’t seem to have a problem with going out and getting it. They also balk at rules they deem senseless. So, who’s right, the Millennial who wants complete laissez-faire management, or the manager who wants to set rules?

Neither. That’s the problem: We are in a state of limbo with regard to talent management and employee relations. A dismal economy, which decreases job security, tightens budgets and limits perks, puts senior managers in a difficult position. The natural reaction? To want to regain control. For junior staffers, this admittedly legitimate gesture seems staggeringly unfair. It raises so many questions: How do they plan to compensate me for my hard work? With widespread cost cutting, will I get a raise? If not, what else is in it for me?

PR News runs story after story urging communications executives to consider untraditional benefits that act as incentives for these complex creatures. This will be even more critical in 2009, when fewer perks will come in the form of monetary raises and bonuses. Strategies for assuaging the resulting internal strife:

- **Choose your battles.**

Managing employees of any age is a little bit like raising children: You nurture their strengths and help them improve their weaknesses in the hopes that they will grow into efficient, effective and valuable members of the company. That means

giving them some rope to work with—and knowing when to pull them back. You make rules, and they break them. Sometimes you punish them, and sometimes you decide that no harm really came from their actions. Learn to tell the difference.

- **Delegate responsibility.**

Boredom and unchallenging work are among the biggest causes for low employee morale and turnover. If you recognize a sense of restlessness in an employee, pull him/her aside and ask what can be done to reinvigorate their enthusiasm. More often than not, you’ll find that the wish is easy (and probably free) to grant.

- **Never respond to “why?” with “because I said so.”**

It’s the fastest way to lose employees’ respect.

These are just two broad topics that fall under the umbrella of communications, but they are two that I repeatedly hear industry leaders discussing. They are also leading the massive changes taking place within organizations. But if there is anything that can be learned from the past year’s trials and tribulations, it’s that rules do have a place in business, but that place has changed. Saying that rules are for other people may be flippant advice, but tweak the concept only slightly, and you’ll arrive at an old Latin phrase that, when translated, offers a compelling message:

Fortune favors the bold. **PRN**

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