

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Contents

Media Relations

Marketing

Research

Evolving Media Relations Strategists: Media Planning for the Future

With all the tangential elements that have been adopted by the communications function, it's easy to overlook one of its founding tenets: media relations. Couple that with the fact that media relations is no longer as cut and dried as securing print coverage, and you're faced with a tough reality—that your media relations

plan now must contain everything but the kitchen sink (and sometimes even that). How can you develop the most strategic media mix—and budget accordingly—in these times of disintermediation and audience fragmentation?

A new survey conducted by *PR News* and **Medialink** delves into the media planning repertoires of the modern-day communications leader, uncovering the most-used media placement tools, the average budget alloca-

tion per media type (print, TV, radio and Web) and the importance of said media types to overall communications efforts. (For abridged results, see charts on page 2 and 6; for full survey results, please visit www.prnewsonline.com.) Perhaps the most interesting revelation: In response to the survey question, "Do you exclusively focus on earned media activities in your role?" 70% of respondents selected "no."

"The fact that 70% of

responding communicators are focused on more than just earned media provides more support for the convergence of traditional PR and marketing roles," says Larry Thomas, COO of Medialink. "The main driver of this convergence is the Web. It challenges the rules for engaging audiences, from the format of a message to the need to engage people one-on-one. That's the PR professional's charge."

Page 2 ▶

(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn In This Week's Issue Of *PR News*

1. 70% of survey respondents do not exclusively focus on earned media activities. (p. 2)
2. Microsoft came out on top in a Corporate Media Reputation Index for the fourth straight year. (p. 3)
3. Reporting structures, personality conflicts and competition for attention are three reasons why PR and HR often can't collaborate successfully. (p. 8)
4. 56% of survey respondents say that print is the most important type of media for overall communications efforts. (p. 6)
5. An economic downturn is the best time to invest money in hiring talent and marketing your organization. (p. 7)
6. When planning your media mix, there are four questions you must ask yourself before getting started. (p. 6)
7. Hillary Clinton has shifted her brand from "leading" to "attack." (p. 3)

Employee Relations

Agency-Client Relations

Weathering the Recession: When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Spend More Money

Let's face it: The economy is falling apart. Stock prices are tanking, the housing market is at rock bottom—and still going down—and Wall Street staffers look like they're ready to jump at any moment.

Businesses both small and large are feeling the heat, with cost cutting, layoffs and corporate "restructurings" (read: layoffs) ruling the day. Of course, this has obvious implications for communicators, with clients and agencies alike scaling back and/or trimming the fat, which inevitably challenges managers to maintain some sense of confidence and morale among employees.

Yes, things are dismal (dare we say apocalyptic?), but it's times like these that senior

managers must pull themselves together and lead their organization through tough times. But, unless your organization offers free Xanax handouts in the lunchroom, soldiering on is easier said than done. Here are a few pointers to help you weather the storm:

▶ **Think growth.** It may be human instinct to downsize when times are tough, but that approach will only elongate your period of suffering. Rather, take advantage of the fact that everyone is up against the same recession challenge by getting ahead of the game with aggressive marketing.

"The smartest organizations are the ones that spend more when times are tight," says

Steve Cody, managing partner of **Peppercom**. "Because of the belt-tightening that's going on, there won't be too many PR firms doing a lot of marketing, so it really is the smartest time." (See sidebar for ideas on marketing your organization during a recession.)

▶ **Don't turn a blind eye.** It may be tempting to ignore the constant coverage of economic woes, but communications professionals need to be proactive in learning what it all means for their business.

"Prepare a worst-case, 12-month cash-flow scenario. Assume a 10% to 20% drop in revenues and identify what changes you would make and

Page 7 ▶



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Media Planning

► Page 1

It's a charge that is being validated by more financial support, based on survey results. Nearly 28% of respondents said that between 26% and 50% of their 2008 budget was allocated for Web media; print was only slightly higher, with a 31% allocation in that bracket. However, looking at

the results, one can quickly see that there is no one-size-fits-all formula for the perfect media mix—or for the budgets that back it, for that matter. Thus, communications executives have to take a hard look at every initiative they are planning and shape a very tailored plan accordingly.

"Any public relations professional trying to reach a specific audience can't do it through one medium alone. Devise strategies and back them up with tactics to reach your target audience," Thomas says. "This approach must be applied to every campaign."

Page 6 ►

PR News/Medialink Media Relations Planning Survey

1. Please select the description that most closely matches your primary responsibilities:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Public Relations | 42.7% |
| Marketing | 18.9% |
| Media Relations..... | 17.4% |
| Corporate Communications..... | 16.0% |
| Public Affairs | 4.7% |
| No Response..... | 0.3% |

2. Do you exclusively focus on earned media activities in your role?

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| No | 70.3% |
| Yes | 29.7% |

3. Please indicate the estimated percentages of your 2008 budget allocated for each type of media.

(If you answered "Yes" to question 2, please continue with this question. If you answered "No" to question 2, please skip to question 4.)

a. Print

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| No Response | 39.5% |
| between 26%-50% | 22.1% |
| between 51% and 75% | 20.1% |
| less than 25% | 10.2% |
| 76% to 100% | 5.5% |
| 0% | 2.6% |

b. Television

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| No Response | 40.7% |
| less than 25% | 22.7% |
| 0% | 19.8% |
| between 26%-50% | 14.0% |
| between 51% and 75% | 2.9% |

c. Radio

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| No Response | 40.4% |
| less than 25% | 28.5% |
| 0% | 17.7% |
| between 26%-50% | 10.8% |
| between 51% and 75% | 2.3% |
| 76% to 100% | 0.3% |

d. Web

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| No Response | 40.1% |
| between 26%-50% | 21.5% |
| less than 25% | 18.9% |
| between 51% and 75% | 11.9% |

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| 0% | 4.1% |
| 76% to 100% | 3.5% |

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important, rank the following media placement tools and techniques in terms of importance to your overall communications efforts.

(Only answer this question if you answered "No" to question 2)

a. News releases

| | |
|--|-------|
| (includes text-only or video and multimedia) | |
| 5 | 45.1% |
| 4 | 27.6% |
| 3 | 12.5% |
| No Response | 5.5% |
| 2 | 4.9% |
| 1 | 4.4% |

b. Media briefings or interviews

| | |
|---|-------|
| (across all media: print, TV, radio or Web) | |
| 5 | 32.0% |
| 4 | 29.1% |
| 3 | 16.9% |
| 2 | 10.5% |
| 1 | 6.4% |
| No Response | 5.2% |

c. Media buys

| | |
|--|-------|
| (advertisements via print, TV, radio or Web ads) | |
| 1 | 30.8% |
| 3 | 20.6% |
| 2 | 20.3% |
| 4 | 14.5% |
| 5 | 7.8% |
| No Response | 5.8% |

d. Sponsorships

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| 2 | 25.6% |
| 1 | 24.4% |
| 3 | 22.1% |
| 4 | 12.2% |
| 5 | 8.4% |
| No Response | 7.3% |

e. Trade show marketing

| | |
|---------|-------|
| 1 | 32.0% |
| 2 | 20.1% |
| 3 | 18.0% |
| 4 | 14.2% |
| 5 | 8.7% |

Source: PR News and Medialink

Corporate Reputation Kings; A Chilly Reception Among Employees; Political Brands; Sustainability Disclosure

► **Kings of Corporate Media Reputation:** With the release of Cision's annual Corporate Media Reputation Index comes the news that **Microsoft** remained No. 1 for 2007, making it the fourth straight year that the software giant took the top spot. According to Cision spokespeople, the positive outcome for the company can be at least partially attributed to strong sales of its Halo 3 video game. Surprisingly, **General Motors** and **Ford** both had strong turnouts (ranking 2 and 12, respectively) despite profitability struggles and a declining U.S. market share.

The top 10 companies in the Corporate Media Reputation Index are:

1. Microsoft
2. General Motors
3. AT&T
4. Intel
5. Verizon
6. Walt Disney
7. Wal-Mart
8. Boeing
9. Cisco
10. News Corp.

Source: Cision 2007 Corporate Media Reputation Index

► **Office Gripes: Blumberg Capital Partners**, a U.S. investment firm and commercial real estate manager, has released

the results of a national survey measuring the effect of office building conditions on worker attitudes, productivity and motivation. Many office workers had a thing or two to say about their working environments:

- One in three workers surveyed said they had either accepted or left a job due to the building's condition and/or amenities offered.
- 36% described their office environment as "bland," 7% as "dumpy" and 4% as "stodgy."
- 47%, the highest proportion of respondents, complained of extreme office temperatures due to poor heating, AC and ventilation systems.
- About 1/4 of respondents described the cleanliness of their buildings as either "marginal" or "appalling."
- 1/3 of workers expressed concern about getting sick or injured as a result of unsafe building conditions.
- 80% of workers said the overall condition of their office buildings affects how they perceive their employers.
- 69% claimed that the condition of their office buildings affects their own productivity and motivation.

Source: Blumberg Capital Partners

► **A Brand Image in Trouble:** Alan Siegel of **Siegel+Gale** asserts that presidential candidates in the current cycle are clearly packaged as brands, using research to determine how they are perceived and working hard to position themselves as distinctive from the competition. John McCain is the straight-talking rebel, John Edwards the empathetic populist, Barack Obama the energetic, charismatic agent of change, and so on. Hillary Clinton, in turn, has fashioned herself as the leading Democratic brand, an experienced leader and Washington insider.

As the Obama-Clinton rivalry heats up, however, and as Clinton abandons her position as the "leading brand" by morphing into an "attack brand," with her attacks on Obama, the "challenger brand," Siegel argues she is sabotaging her own brand voice. Instead of leveraging her experiences and her public policy ideas, she is feeding voters' concerns about her personal ambition and determination to be elected, whatever the cost. In order to win the nomination, Clinton ought to stay true to her own brand image, adopting the role of a thought leader and rising above petty attack strategies.

Source: Siegel+Gale

► **Developing Disclosure:** A recently released study by the **Social Investment Research Analyst** network examines the prevalence of sustainability disclosure in emerging markets worldwide. Sustainability disclosure is designed to provide information on a company's environmental, social and governance performance, as well as its impact and initiatives for improving performance in these areas. The results of the survey showed promise, but plenty of room for improvement, said the research firm:

- 87% of firms now offer at least some sustainability disclosure.
- South Africa performed the best in terms of disclosure, with six companies meeting all five criteria, accounting for 75% of the country sample.
- China lags behind other nations, with three companies sampled meeting none of the criteria, and only 25% meeting all criteria.
- Only 27% of the surveyed firms used the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework, the widely recognized standard for environmental, social and governance reporting.

Source: Social Investment Research Analyst Network PRN

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Greasing the Skids: Shell Uses Employee Engagement and Outreach to Rebuild a Community

Company: Shell Oil Company
Agency: Dittus Communications and Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald
Timeframe: October 2005-ongoing

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita decimated the U.S. oil and gas production operations in the Gulf of Mexico, exacting \$250 to \$300 million in damages, **Shell Oil Company** sought to create a business recovery plan in the Gulf region, as well as to align itself with the needs of an area brutalized by Mother Nature. Targeting Shell employees as well as business partners and local decision makers, Shell launched its “Coming Home Campaign” (CHC), a community relations and employment engagement program whose goal was twofold: to provide immediate assistance for both the hurricane-affected communities and the employees who work in these areas, and to attract and retain the Shell workforce in this region.

In October 2005, the program commenced when the team, which worked with **Dittus Communications** on the initiative, polled local Shell employees in the Gulf region who believed that

for New Orleans to recover from the devastation, Shell should lead the way. Because Shell was already a client of Dittus Communications, it was a *fait accompli* that they would work together on the program, according to Laura Sheehan, vice president and practice leader of Dittus Communications.

The Shell employees were critical in developing a plan of action. “One of those things we did was interview employees to see what they thought was most important that they give back to the community,” explains Sheehan. “We developed benchmark goals and focused on those throughout the campaign to make sure we were hitting [displaced] employees’ goals and wishes of returning 1,000 of them to the city and keeping the project on time.” **Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald**, a local New Orleans PR firm, also worked on the program.

The preliminary research honed CHC objectives and aligned directly with Shell’s three-pronged mission of efficient business recovery: immediate recovery to employee needs; community recovery to support the community where employees live, work and operate; and investment in



Shell employees rally behind the Coming Home Campaign.

Photo courtesy of Dittus Communications

the future to retain and attract workforce and support workforce development.

The strategizing focused on two main areas:

- **Employee Engagement:** In those areas in which Shell excels, the company engaged its personnel for projects that leveraged their knowledge, expertise and capabilities; and
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** For those projects that did not touch Shell’s core competencies, the company expanded upon existing relationships or developed new private-pact partnerships.

To foster community and employee goodwill, the CHC team relied on events, internal communications and earned and paid media. It was important that the program be seen as a comprehensive community and employee engagement initiative and not as yet another disaster response effort. The team worked with partners to carry out key messages of the program.

Providing \$45 million in

hurricane-related employee assistance programs, Shell helped employees, business and civic leaders move toward closure. It developed the Employee Ambassador Grant Program, which was used to restore daycare centers and preschools, as well as rebuild homes and replace libraries. The company also donated funds to the **New Orleans Police & Justice Foundation** to address first responder housing needs, and financed permanent volunteer housing in certain Louisiana parishes.

By partnering up with the **Kennedy School of Government**, Shell supported the revitalization of Broadmoor, a New Orleans neighborhood. Shell sponsored interns from the Kennedy School to live and work in Broadmoor. The collaboration with residents resulted in a rebuilding plan that became a model for other neighborhood rebuilding programs.

Also, because Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused \$1 billion worth of damage to the Gulf Coast, the Louisiana fishing industry was badly damaged; plus, no federal funds

RISING FROM THE ASHES

When implementing a community recovery program, having committed team players is essential to a successful outcome, says Laura Sheehan, VP and practice leader of **Dittus Communications**, one of the PR firms that help spearhead **Shell’s** Coming Home Campaign.

“Each situation is inherently different, and you have different players and focal points, but it’s really to amass people who have knowledge of the community and expertise to be able to reach out to third-party groups and connect the dots,” she maintains. “[It’s important] that you have a group of people who are empowered to make decisions, that you have a plan of action and are working toward that plan of action and that you don’t get bogged down in bureaucracy.”

had reached fishermen. Shell donated funds for icehouses that would revive the Louisiana fishing industry.

Another noteworthy project that fell under the auspices of this program was the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Despite its positive impact on New Orleans, Jazz Fest 2006 was in jeopardy. The venue was heavily damaged, musicians were displaced and event sponsors were hesitant to continue their support. Shell stepped in and became the first-ever presenting sponsor.

Providing its employees with 10,000 discounted tickets, approximately 220 Shell staffers volunteered at the event, traveling as far as Houston to fill the void left by relocated residents. What was important about the continuation of this event is that Jazz Fest demonstrated that New Orleans was open for tourists. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of music lovers from all 50 states and across the globe attended the event.

To fulfill the third part of the program's mission—keeping jobs in Louisiana, Shell employed the following tactics:

- **Collaboration with Louisiana State University (LSU):** LSU and Shell partnered up to increase recruitment in areas central to Shell's business model, including

research and environmental studies. Shell also contributed to a workforce development project to support the transition from college to work; and,

- **Restoration of the McMain Unified School:** Shell supports a four-year science and engineering curriculum at McMain Unified School, one of the two public high schools open five months after Hurricane Katrina hit the region. Here Shell installed state-of-the-art computer labs at McMain and forged a partnership with New Orleans Public Schools and the National Science Resource Center to improve math and science education.

The program's ROI was staggering in scope. Almost 60% of local employees accessed nearly \$60,000 in Ambassador Grants, while Shell employees logged 22,000 volunteer hours. Also, 99% of local Shell employees polled stated a commitment to stay with Shell.

Other results were the following:

- \$200 to \$250 million in Jazz Fest revenue was raised for the city of New Orleans;
- 60 tons of ice per day was produced for fishing (up from less than one ton in June '06);

- LSU's recruitment goal was exceeded by 170%; LSU was Shell's top recruiting university in 2006;

- 36% of metro New Orleans residents are much more likely to apply for a job at Shell;

- 71% of New Orleanians have a favorable view of Shell, higher than that of its competitors;

- Local opinion groups place Shell as the most socially responsible oil/energy company; and,

- According to a University of New Orleans analysis, Shell contributions to New Orleans recovery accounted for more than \$1 billion in primary and secondary spending. Local and state revenues rose by more than \$13 million and Shell employees volunteered more than \$800,000 worth of time.

The team secured more than 1,000 media hits about CHC that resulted in at least 135,000 impressions. Highlights were a feature story on Katie Couric's inaugural broadcast of the *CBS Evening News*, a front-page feature story in the *New York Times*, a front-page Business Section feature in the *Washington Post*, eight sto-

ries on CNN and placements with the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, *Houston Chronicle*, Associated Press, Reuters, NPR, CNBC, *USA Today* and the *Christian Science Monitor*.

For Sheehan, the challenges were easily overcome by the determination and initiative of Shell employees.

"You can do so much in a situation with the devastation that was wrought down there by Hurricane Katrina and then Rita. There are so many opportunities to do these things, picking and choosing what you were going to do was a challenge. And the employees really provided the guidance to make that happen."

Shell's "Coming Home Campaign" was the recipient of numerous laurels, among them the Clinton Global Initiative, which recognized the Broadmoor Project as a public-private partnership model, and a 2007 *PR News* Platinum PR Award in the category of community relations.

In addition, Frank Glaviano, Shell VP of production, Americas, was named "New Orleanian of the Year" while the Kennedy School invited Shell to share its CHC best practices in its Social Responsibility Initiative. **PRN**

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THE PR NEWS BLOG LAUNCHES INTO CYBERSPACE

It's a blog-eat-blog world out there, and no one knows it better than the editors at *PR News*. That's why we took months to pore over every business- and communications-related blog we could find to understand exactly what you, as digital media consumers and communications professionals, wanted—and what you didn't.

Our research culminated in the official *PR News* blog, which is now live and kicking at www.prnewsonline.com/prnewsblog. On it, you will find commentary by *PR News* Editor Courtney Barnes and Group Publisher Diane Schwartz on everything from current events (with a PR twist) to fear of flying and what a four-day hike to Machu Picchu can teach you about surviving communications meltdowns.

Of course, as is the case in the weekly newsletter, the blog will stay true to the *PR News* mission of "building the bridge between PR and the bottom line" by offering strategies and insights into all that PR touches—which, we've found, is just about everything. The blog will complement the newsletter's high-level strategies and tactics with a fun, conversational look at PR as an industry and a discipline.

We hope you will take a moment out of your busy days to read and comment, to agree or disagree, to teach or learn. As always, we welcome your perspectives, and we hope this blog will give you another way to interact with your peers, and to tell us at *PR News* what's on your minds.

Media Planning

► Page 2

The key, then, is reaching the target audience via that perfect mix. Consider the following best practices for doing so:

► **Remember that hindsight is 20/20:** Always look at the media platform breakdown used for past initiatives. While it might be irrelevant to your present project, it still provides a benchmark against which you can revise your strategy. Ask yourself how that audience differs from the one you are currently targeting, and how successful the past mix was in reaching it. If analysis reveals, for example, that an audience segment responded especially well to social media outreach, it can inform future strategies.

► **Ask yourself the right questions before getting started.** Thomas highlights four questions that communicators must ask their teams in order to develop a successful media planning road map:

• **Who is your target audience?** This question addresses the need to thoroughly define your target audience, from demographics and

psychographics to the places in which they normally consume media. “Research will show you what percentage of their time and media consumption is happening through various channels,” Thomas says.

- **What is the message you want to deliver?** If you can’t boil an initiative or outreach effort down to a succinct, consistent message, you might as well be tossing confetti into the wind.
- **What is the desired outcome?** “This is key,” Thomas says. He advises against thinking impressions are the desired outcome—these are merely a means to an end. “You want to prompt a certain action,” he says. “Today you can actually track specific results with regards to business activity.”
- **How do you report your success?** Coming to the table with quantifiable measures of success is essential to get support for future initiatives, and digital media is a good place to start. “PR professionals can

engage audiences with traditional editorial content, but now there is a feedback mechanism,” Thomas says. “That whole concept of taking a traditional PR message and putting it in front of the appropriate audience now allows the message recipient to take action.”

► **Don’t overlook digital channels in the planning phase.** When planning the media mix for an upcoming initiative, it is easy to get stuck in the comfort zone of traditional media and, in turn, to overlook all the ways in which digital communications channels can dovetail these elements—especially if you are working in tandem with the marketing department (which, as the survey results suggest, many of you are).

“Right now we are in a stage where a lot of communications people aren’t really 100% sure how much energy, effort and resources they should put into reaching out via new media. How do you identify the ones that really reach the audience you are targeting?” says Robert Minton, communications manager, **General Motors**.

“Certainly [at General Motors], we’ve changed how we plan our media mix to be more digitally focused. The Web is allowing us to communicate faster and more completely. Now you can let the end users decide what fits their needs best.”

The *PR News/Medialink* survey results indicate that communicators are opening themselves up to Web platforms, with approximately 65% of respondents ranking these media as important to overall communications efforts. However, it’s still important to reinforce that digital platforms can’t be afterthoughts in media planning strategies; they must always be tied to meeting desired objectives.

“Marketers enter these [online] platforms before setting the objectives that they actually want to achieve,” Jamie Byrne, head of client solutions and ad programs, **YouTube**, said during last month’s CMO Leadership Forum in New York City.

Given the indication that PR execs and markets are working more closely on media planning initiatives, this is an opportunity for public relations professionals to take the lead and set objectives that are meaningful and strategic, and that incorporate online platforms.

Ultimately, no matter what your media mix strategy is, one thing can always be said:

“The answer is simple,” Thomas says. “Don’t go in with the mind-set of reaching people through one *or* the other. Embrace all forms of media.”

PRN

PR News/Medialink Media Relations Planning Survey, Con’t

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important, rank the following types of media in terms of importance to your overall communications efforts.

a. Print

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| 5 | 56.4% |
| 4 | 20.9% |
| No Response | 11.3% |
| 3 | 6.4% |
| 1 | 3.5% |
| 2 | 1.5% |

b. Television

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1 | 23.5% |
| 3 | 18.3% |
| 4 | 17.7% |
| 2 | 14.8% |

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| No Response | 12.8% |
| 5 | 12.8% |

c. Radio

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| 1 | 25.3% |
| 3 | 23.3% |
| 2 | 22.1% |
| No Response | 12.5% |
| 4 | 11.3% |
| 5 | 5.5% |

d. Web

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| 5 | 35.2% |
| 4 | 29.4% |
| 3 | 13.4% |
| No Response | 11.9% |
| 2 | 7.3% |
| 1 | 2.9% |

Source: PR News and Medialink

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Weathering the Recession

► Page 1

when,” Gregg Landers, director of growth management at **CBIZ Accounting Tax & Advisory Services**, told *BusinessWeek*. This is a worst-case scenario, though, so don’t immediately act on it; it’s the equivalent of coming up with a crisis plan “just in case.” Still, it’s worth knowing the numbers and having plans b, c and d to fall back on if necessary.

► **Focusing on short-term gains will lead to long-term heartache.** Full-blown pessimism won’t fix your problems. Recessions don’t play favorites in terms of the industries they ravage, so a slight (or not-so-slight) dip in stock price (or any other measure of success), while not desirable, is still normal. Instead of taking a machete to your budget, ask yourself what the real repercussions of these blips (missed earnings forecasts, etc.) will be in the bigger picture. Often you will find that going about business as usual will give you added value in the long run, as opposed to cutting costs to see small savings in the here-and-now.

► **Be proactive online.** Web platforms are a great place to “retreat” if you don’t have the financial resources to pour into more traditional outlets. Test creative ideas, products or services online among targeted audiences, either through social media platforms or e-mail.

Video platforms such as **YouTube** are also cost-effective outlets—not to mention great exercises in becoming fluent in “digital.” According to Andy Berndt, managing director of **Google’s** Creative Lab, “The act of uploading a video to YouTube is more valuable than a four-day offsite marketing forum.”

► **Send a positive message internally.** Beyond marketing your organization to external audiences, you should spend money on making your employees feel valued, not expendable. Yes, that means spending money, but retaining talent will save you tenfold down the line.

“Whether it’s good times or bad, you really want to focus in on the best employees and make sure they are staying put,” Cody says. “Maintaining a business-as-usual posture sends a very important, nonverbal messages to the staff.”

Cody illustrates this with the following example: During the last recession, Peppercom eliminated the free sodas and snacks in its break room to cut costs. It seemed like a no-harm-no-foul decision, but it immediately caused employees’ anxiety to spike. This time around, management took the opposite approach: It installed new, top-of-the-line coffee machines to reassure employees that it’s all quiet on the Western front.

► **Be above-board with employees.** There are things managers should do beyond keeping the break room stocked with freebies—namely, they should constantly reinforce their strategies for enduring the downturn so employees don’t feel like they’re in the dark. Have monthly staff meetings to update your team, host weekly focus groups to hear their ideas for improving business and meet with employees one-on-one to keep lines of communication open.

► **Put valued clients on a pedestal.** Recessions may mean trimming the fat for many organizations, so PR professionals have to go above and beyond to prove their value.

Likewise, clients should prove their own worth; if there is one in particular that is a thorn in your side, it’s a good time to part ways. That leaves more time for valued clients and customers.

“Take a look at your biggest clients and ask, ‘What if they were to put this account up for review tomorrow? What would we do differently?’” Cody says. “Take a hard look at your accounts and step up all your efforts.”

Consider volunteering to spend a day shadowing your client so you can observe the impact the recession is having on his/her business. This will offer insight into what you can do to make their business better and, in turn, make yourself indispensable.

“It’s about finding out what the value-add is—anything and everything you can do to better understand their business,” Cody says. “Whatever is the nirvana that justifies their continued investment in your services—that’s what you want to hone.”

► **Get out in front of your community.** The current business climate isn’t only shaking investor and employee confidence; it’s rattling the psyches of consumers in your community. By getting out in front of them with positive messages—even if it’s as simple as donating to a local charity or sponsoring a community event—you can allay their fears and boost their confidence in your organization.

Whatever the impact of the recession on your business, one thing is clear: Battening down the hatches sends the wrong message to all stakeholders. Cody boils it down to this:

“Steady as she goes’ is not a successful formula in a downturn.”

That advice, plus a good, strong drink at the end of the day, will do wonders. **PRN**

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IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID

Need some ideas for keeping your organization top-of-mind among stakeholders when the economy is anything but accommodating? Consider these options:

- **Home in on thought leadership:** A recession is the perfect time to focus on the thought leadership of your organization (especially if things are slow on the client front). Pick three topics to which you can speak authoritatively, and draft columns and articles. Use these to pitch to journals, newsletters, bloggers—anything that will get your name out there and show that just because the economy is taking a nosedive doesn’t mean you are, too.
- **Apply for industry awards:** Almost every communications-related publication and organization has its own roster of awards—apply to all of them. It’s a great way to establish credibility, and winning a few can do wonders for boosting the morale of employees and clients.
- **Develop new products and services:** When no news is good news in the business world, create some positive buzz by rolling out a new product or service. It shows that you aren’t marking time, and it just might be the exact thing a client needed to decide to stay onboard.

PR and HR: Why These Functions Aren't Kissing Cousins, and 5 Things You Can Do to Change That



Throughout my nearly 20 years in the communications business, I've heard this phrase more than any other: We need a seat at the table. Practitioners lament, and rightfully so, that if only they were involved in business decisions, corporate issues could be better planned for and managed.

Sound familiar? Probably so. But the "we" in this phrase applies to HR as well as PR professionals.

Human resources professionals, who play vital roles in any organization, feel just as left out of the strategic decision-making process as we in public relations have felt. Just like us, their sense is that they could add much more value to the organization if only they were asked for their counsel. They are tired of being treated as the personnel department, in much the same way we get tired of being treated like the arts and crafts department. We both feel underappreciated.

So if HR and PR share many of the same issues, why don't the two get along any better than they do in most organizations? Can the relationship be strengthened?

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Because my career has been spent entirely in internal communications, I learned early on about the uneasy peace between HR and PR, though I didn't have much of a sense about why things seemed to be tenuous, at least at first. Now, I continually discover that the reasons for this tension fall into three broad categories:

- **Reporting Structure.** When PR and HR reported through completely separate channels, there was little, if any, incentive to play nice. There were fewer attempts to try to

work together and less interest in finding the common ground upon which you could build a relationship.

- **Personalities.** In several instances, the rift was caused by personality differences between both the senior leaders of the departments and their teams. PR, marketing and other creative departments tend to have a totally different personality than accounting, finance and other buttoned-down departments. Because of their roles, PR and HR both straddle the line between creative and buttoned-down, and so they have dual personalities. This is a hindrance to a better relationship because the primary personality for PR (creative) isn't naturally compatible with the primary personality for HR (buttoned-down).

- **Competing for attention.** In a couple of instances, the dust-up was caused by jealousy brought on by the two functions competing for attention. Either the HR department or the PR department had the ear of the CEO and the senior leadership team. Sometimes HR was on the senior leadership team and PR wasn't. And even on the rare occasion when both had seats at the table and equal access, the perception was that one function was getting the short end of the deal when it came to providing strategic counseling and being heard.

HOW CAN WE MAKE THINGS BETTER?

Now that we have some ideas about why things might be strained, what can we do to change things for the better?

Here are five things you can start today that will help build and strengthen a rewarding relationship with HR.

1. Assign an account executive to HR. Name one person, preferably the internal communications person, to be the liaison between HR and PR. This person is now the point person for all that goes on in HR and can represent both functions to each department. It's advisable that this person attend HR team meetings on a regular basis.

2. Join SHRM, the Society for Human Resources Management. Think how impressed you'd be if the senior leader of HR was also a PRSA or IABC member. That would signal to you how serious that person was in finding out more about your industry, the issues, the challenges and the excitement. Once you start reading their publications and notices, you'll have a new understanding of HR and how the function works. You'll also begin to see that their plight and yours are similar, giving you plenty of incentive to bond with someone so you both can help solve common challenges.

3. Pitch collaborative projects between PR and HR. Once you have your liaison in place and a better understanding about the issues facing HR, develop a handful of ideas for projects your two departments can work on together. Good examples include relaunching the 401(k) program with a companywide campaign or introducing a new kind of employee recognition program. HR plays a crucial role in both of these areas and would appreciate a collaborative effort to make them successful.

4. Identify opportunities to work on and support HR's initiatives. A great example is benefits communication. How many times has HR sent out a giant book that is obviously provided by the insurance underwriter and written by lawyers for lawyers. Your employees can't understand language like that. Helping to write or edit that information, along with helping to provide an overall campaign for launching the annual benefits enrollment, will go a long way toward showing HR that you want their initiatives to succeed while ensuring they follow the same communication standards you've set for your own materials.

5. Mingle the two departments. Familiarity breeds trust. The more you're around someone, the more you know them and understand them. Better understanding leads to trust. And trust leads to stronger relationships.

Despite the core differences that will always remain between the two functions, HR and PR are ultimately responsible for helping to manage an organization's two most valuable resources: its brand and its employees. Through these five simple steps, you can help move these two departments closer together and find ways to strengthen both in the process. *PRN*

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