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EFFECTIVE PR AND ADVERTISING
IN A MULTIMEDIA LANDSCAPE

PRESENTATION BY KATHY O´BRIEN
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Over the past three days, we have been bombarded with possibilities. The possibilities for accessing information, for reaching out to others, for educating, for finding alternative views. For every new possibility we now laud, there is a new complexity being layered onto the job of the public relations practitioner.

I started in PR in the early 'eighties in New York. I remember the pressure of being the newest kid on the block in a PR consultancy: proof-read the press release, then make sure it gets photocopied and stapled correctly, then make sure it gets delivered to every journalist.

Pity today’s practitioner. Here’s her quick checklist. Write the notification that something is coming and put it into faxes and emails, onto your website and onto a central website accessed by journalists. Write the press release for the print media. Prepare other, more detailed, material for the web site. Create the footage broadcasters will need to tell the story. Be sure to give details of how the footage will come—by tape, by satellite feed—in all those notifications. Train your spokespeople for all media—print, radio, television. If it’s a major event, hold it as a teleconference so journalists can tune in from
decision-maker in Asia, the chances are you travel a lot—you’ve got CNN or CNBC on in your hotel room while you eat breakfast. It has become a fast catch-up system for the busy manager on the move.

Studies show people find TV very credible. In the UK when respondents were asked ‘what is the most believable news source?’, more than 70% said TV is the medium they are most likely to believe versus radio and newspaper. The same survey conducted in Germany showed almost 50% believe that TV is the most credible news source.

Eighty-six percent of consumers in China already say they prefer to receive their news from television rather than other media. And this trend is increasing throughout Asia-Pacific.

The reasons for this are simple: television is fast. It uses pictures to tell the story quickly and easily. You and I have grown to expect that. We want the news NOW! And we rely on it.

The next great wave is the Internet. It has been hailed by BBC’s chief as the third broadcast medium.

The Internet gives you news when you want it. Television networks are now actively merging with the Internet. In fact, major international networks have their own web sites linked to their programmes for easier access.

The convergence of television and the Internet is a phenomenon that is here to stay. Each week, 200,000 expatriate Germans get their news via the Internet from one of the main broadcasters in Germany, ARD. If you’re still uncertain as to whether or not Bill Clinton committed acts of indiscretion with Monica Lewinsky, check out the MSNBC site; you can download and view the actual footage of his TV interviews.

Recent research shows that America Online is now the premier source of news for young adults at 7:00 p.m. in the US—ahead of TV.

At the moment, Asia is the fastest-growing market for Internet use. Whilst last year there were about 14 million subscribers, by 2000 there
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At the moment, Asia is the fastest-growing market for Internet use. Whilst last year there were about 14 million subscribers, by 2000 there
will be about 43 million. The amount of Internet traffic in the region will increase by about 500% every year.

To cope with this increasing demand, telecommunications companies are laying so much data-carrying cable on the sea floors that some have spoken of a ‘bandwidth boom’. At the same time PCs are increasing in speed and capacity so fast that Bill Gates has advised us to throw them out after three years.

And because of this media convergence, new technologies are being developed to deliver more hours of more customised television content. As you are all aware, we are on the brink of a digital television revolution.

More important than delivering clearer pictures, digital television will allow broadcasters more programming options. For every analogue channel you now get, there is room for six digital channels. Thus, the entry of a digital operator into a market could increase the number of channels massively—and quickly.

According to a study by CIT research, satellites serving Asia-Pacific could be transmitting over 1,600 digital TV channels by 2001. Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore are set to be hot digital TV markets. To stress this point even more, by the end of 1998, only four of Star TV's 23 channels will still use analogue transmission.

By the end of 1996, 5.6 million households around the world were already viewing digital transmissions. And recent reports suggest that digital television will reach 235 million households worldwide by the year 2005. This can only mean one thing: a vast transition from a mass-market world to a personalised one.

Television producers and programme specialists will have the time of their life creating niche programmes for every conceivable target market. A multi-channel environment creates increasing demands for programming content to fill the television time slots. Broadcasters and production companies are now under pressure to create a huge variety of niche programming. What this means is a future in which information can be tailored to much smaller, more defined groups of users.
Everything from news to fishing can be customised to meet viewers’ special interests.

The challenge that media practitioners and communications experts face is how to achieve maximum brand and image building in this changing multimedia landscape.

The opportunities to reach target markets are enormous. Television provides a wider scope to reach a more defined target audience. This helps in the process of designing your messages, as audiences are no longer generic.

The challenge is for organisations to convey key messages and build their brand and image globally by appearing on television beyond advertising. Real leaders will be seen regularly not only on news or current affairs programmes, but on the vast array of tailored programmes emerging.

It will take a specialist approach to deliver exactly what is needed to get on air. It could well become a full-time job just to keep abreast of the number of broadcast outlets, not to mention the individual characteristics of the networks.

The key, as ever with television, will be content and visual appeal. There is a huge demand for stories with good pictures, especially as broadcasting resources fall and free or sponsored material becomes more widely accepted. It is important to match the story with the right pictures and deliver them to the right audiences.

Motorola is an excellent example of this opportunity. When the company launched the StarTAC two years ago, it had a real breakthrough on its hands. The product was the smallest and lightest handphone in the world, a truly significant departure from its predecessors. The technology behind it really was news. The fact that Motorola, as a company, was staking a great deal of its future earnings potential on this product was business news. And for the first time, a mobile phone was being positioned as a fashion accessory, with designers featuring it on the catwalks. With the right positioning, Motorola had a business story, a technology story, and a fashion story. But without careful handling, all
it had was a product launch—not, typically, something broadcasters embrace. So their television PR strategy had to be very focused, concentrating on the news value, tailoring to individual country-market sensitivities and delivered very deliberately to the correct producers for the rights types of programmes.

What I’ll show you now is just a quick sample of the coverage Motorola received from its broadcast programme. The StarTAC was reported on TV—editorial, in every instance, in every Asian country targeted.

(MOTOROLA VIDEO)

Communications practitioners must see beyond print. Very simply, brand and image building is a task that cannot be left to print alone.

Maintaining a strong brand presence in the next century will depend on the ability of companies to provide and sponsor the information and entertainment that their target audiences need and want. The challenge in every case will be to find ways of building their brands and messages into the main editorial content of the medium.

You have to build on newsworthy information to do this. Now most organisations do have plenty of genuine stories that will be of interest to broadcasters if approached in the right way.

With television networks’ production budgets shrinking, broadcasters will depend on outside sources. Very simply, if a product breakthrough is being announced in a press conference in Singapore but it will impact on your over-all Asia-Pacific operations, don’t expect CNN, CNBC, Sky News or even the Chinese broadcasters to hop on the plane for your press conference. On the other hand, if they don’t have moving pictures, they’re not interested in the story. The answer? Make it easy for the broadcasters.

Here’s an example of how MasterCard International consistently reinforced its corporate image and message that reached an audience of more than half a billion worldwide.
Like the Motorola story, MasterCard’s news was competing with hundreds of other press releases that a news editor gets everyday. The difference for both companies was that they anticipated broadcasters’ needs. They:

- distinguished newsworthy information
- provided pictures that illustrated the story
- gave useful soundbites
- got the material into the hands of the right broadcasters immediately
- not tomorrow, not next week, but today!

In summary, I believe the multimedia landscape is a place where our target markets will map out their own personal information needs and entertainment preferences through a huge number of channels, Internet online pages and broadcast programmes. To the greatest extent possible, our audiences—who are moving targets—will choose raw information and instant access to programming. What companies and media practitioners have to do is to find new ways of building real content around their brands, their issues and their activities. You will also have to do this with new PR methods that grow out of the needs and the rhythms of the electronic media, rather than out of print media techniques.

As choice explodes beyond anything we know now, and the multimedia landscape permits audiences to access undiluted information and entertainment in various forms, companies will have to use far more complex techniques to showcase their brands on these information and entertainment highways.

That is the challenge that will face us all in the multimedia landscape we are currently entering. And it is just the beginning.
Personal Computing
vs
Network Computing

Kwanchai Patanapongpibul