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**Paper No. 39**

## EFFECTIVE P.R. & ADVERTISING IN A MULTIMEDIA LANDSCAPE \*)

By Wisaksono Noeradi \*\*)

President Boris Yeltsin took to cyberspace yesterday to announce he was in excellent health and to pledge that Russia would never return to what he called the "Communist psychosis." The 67-year-old president also told surfers of the World Wide Web he did not think Russia was ready to be led by a woman.

Shortly before making his internet debut, Yeltsin used the much more traditional setting of Russia's foreign ministry to outline the country's international priorities at a forthcoming summit of world leaders in the English city of Birmingham.

Reuters, 12 May 1998

Yes indeed! Yeltsin went multimedia to support his own personal public relations and advertising campaign. In doing so, he became the latest convert among world leaders who now find it more efficient to utilize state-of-the-art information technology in order to get across their messages. So what lesson can we draw from this exercise?

For the purpose of our discussion, let's say that the term multimedia stands for computer-mediated interactive communication integrating text, sound, graphic, still photography, animation, and video. Of course, these six elements—singly or in any combination—are the tools most commonly used in public relations (which essentially "sells the institution's image") and advertising (which basically "sells the institution's product or service").

In my opinion, the key to effective public relations and advertising is to view the relationship between our institution and our stakeholders as a negotiation of interests. Ideally, these relationship should flourish as the result of associations nurtured over time, rather than being hammered together quickly during periods of difficulty.

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Public relations and advertising will continue to undergo profound changes as the information revolution affects the way our institution interacts with stakeholders, not least because of the way our stakeholders themselves are being affected as various technological strands of communication merge.

With today's digital technologies, we are seeing multimedia messages being dispatched from around the world immediately and directly into our own personal computers. Daily newspapers are already delivered electronically to home television sets, in much the same way that a fax is sent through a telephone line. In fact, through "pull" technology, we can even shape the content of those electronic publications to suit our own need and preferences.

Meanwhile, we can already source editorial content from most print media on our PCs with incredible ease. Jakarta online newspapers for instance, can be read on PCs throughout the world some six hours before copies are even available from our city's own news vendors! Believe it or not, California residents can now read the Monday morning edition of Indonesian online newspapers on Sunday evening.

Yet even if institutions can convince the media of the value and validity of the information they offer, that information may proceed no further than the next decision point --the point at which stakeholders decide on what they want to have. Institutions will therefore have to find other more effective ways of communicating with stakeholders, who now enjoy increasingly easy access to information about institutions anywhere in the world through a range of online databases.

These days, we rely more and more on online technology because it is available globally around the clock, because it is interactive, and because it is not subject to censorship or filtering. What's more, it is now possible to measure --with a high degree of accuracy-- how frequently such information is being accessed and by whom.

As the most popular channel for online multimedia application, the Internet has become an increasingly vital method of securing information, fostering educational progress, learning about the availability of goods or services, and establishing commercial linkages. It's estimated that today's community of Internet users totals over 40 million people worldwide. It goes without saying that members of this global community tend to be well-educated and to enjoy relatively high incomes. One recent U.S. survey indicated that 52 percent of those connected to the Internet users are using it primarily for E-mail, 40 percent for research, 28 percent to provide or obtain news, 22 percent for "chatting," and 18 percent to provide or obtain entertainment. Internet users from across the globe "chat" while experiencing virtually no delay in transmission. To give just one more example, a student in Indonesia researching public health can locate and transfer multimedia files from an institution in Thailand --or anywhere else on the planet-- with surprising ease, thanks to the Web.

The information superhighway is probably the best analog for the Internet. This information system is named the "Internet" because of the connection it allows not only between computers, but also among computer networks. The Internet is at present the world's largest computer network. Composed of smaller networks linked together, the Internet has become a community of people using computers to interact with each other. As I mentioned earlier, the Internet also provides a method for obtaining information from a variety of sources worldwide. This information covers a multitude of topics on everything from public to private institutions and earth-shaking events to the most trivial and superficial of messages.

The Internet originated merely as a highly specialized network permitting U.S. Department of Defense personnel. It used what was then revolutionary technology to transfer data in information packets from one computer system to another. This technique, known as Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP), is still being used as the standard method for information

transfer. But what sweeping changes we've witnessed in the past decade! During the late 1980s, a tremendous growth occurred in the number of networked computers with an expanded access available to the general public. The Internet seems destined to continue expanding exponentially as more of the world's citizens use this highly decentralized system on a daily basis --and as more corporations and other institutions discover new ways to exploit the possibilities it offers.

How will these sweeping changes alter the way we operated in the public relations and advertising sectors? Another recent survey in the USA reports that 84 percent of media companies who utilize the Internet say they are using it "very often".

It is obvious that real effective use of the Internet in pursuit of public relations and advertising objectives require well-trained people who not only understand the technology but also the enormous potential it offers. For example, many institutions which want some kind of preference on the Web seem to think that all they really need to do is to post one of their current brochures. But if that's their approach (and their understanding of this new medium), i'd have to say they're wasting their time.

Any institution's website should not only be 1) easy to find and use, 2) up to date, and 3) easy to download. It should also include a list of contact persons and how to reach them easily by phone, fax and E-mail. Those are the basics. But what if an institution mounts a first-class website that no one can find? So there are numerous other matters that must be considered: listings in internet directories, coordination with search engines, linkages with related sites, and so on.

Last year, *Telecommunications* magazine asked leading carriers and operators to define their services strategies and reveal how they would focus on the multimedia market. Needless to say, the specifics of the strategies

vary greatly from operator to operator --as do perceptions of what multimedia is. Yet some commonalities did emerge in various definitions.

A multimedia service conveys several types of information through one "pipeline." It's information that users can manipulate --and with which they can interact. Such definition brings together the producers of goods and services (the content providers), telecoms operators (the providers of a medium for delivery), and information technology professionals (the facilitators of the transmission, manipulation, and storage of content).

Obviously, in a welter of technology, services, players, markets and regulatory policies, the confusion and intensity will continue. Widely differing scenarios have been proposed because --although infrastructure deployment is itself a necessity-- controllable, predictable, businesslike service delivery by alternative options may not be the case.

One of the common objective of public relations and advertising is to carry out a public awareness programs that are timely, effective, cost-efficient, and sustainable. In the Dark Ages of two decades ago --before anyone had ever heard of something called the Internet, we used to say such objectives could often be best achieved through what we called "interactive personal communication", namely discussion and persuasion. We can make the same assertion today, except that we're talking about four varieties of interactive personal communication that didn't even exist back then: websites, E-mail, video conferencing, and CD-ROMs. We'll succeed, in large measure, by how effectively we make optimum use of the multimedia technology.

In conclusion, I'd like to mention the experience of a Jakarta health clinic that greatly expanded the range of its client services by offering health information, counseling, and educational outreach via the Internet. Consequently, a project which was strictly limited to members at the outset subsequently turned

into a valuable forum with a reach that extends across Indonesia, and even the world. And since such forum also proved to be an effective media for advertisers, this project became self-sustaining. I believe it's an outstanding example of how the public relations and advertising sectors can utilize multimedia applications to convey their messages most effectively.

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