

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

July 13, 2005

prnewsonline.com

Issue 27 Vol. 61

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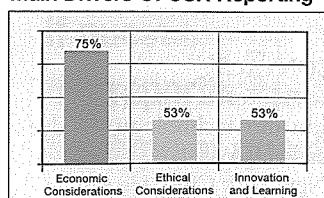
With A Little Help From My Friends: PR Alliances On The Upswing

At The Dow Chemical Co., Paul Oakley is looking for a few good agencies. When a major PR project comes along, Oakley, the North American communications leader for Dow Plastics, is just as likely to offer the assignment to an alliance of smaller independent agencies rather than to any of the mega PR firms.

((PR PULSE))

It's time to get cracking on CSR reports. A survey released last week by KPMG says that, in 2005, 52% of the world's biggest companies issued separate reports on CSR, compared with 45% in 2002 (see chart). But putting together CSR reports has proved problematic; although two-thirds of CSR reports include a section on corporate governance, most reports lacked specifics on how CSR policies are implemented in their companies. The "KPMG International Survey of Corporate Reporting 2005" analyzed CSR reporting trends of more than 1,600 companies, including Fortune 500 firms.

Main Drivers Of CSR Reporting



Source: KPMG

of the smaller agencies develop a particular expertise that we really value," says Oakley, who is based in Houston. "We work with several big agencies, but my experience has been that their promise of one-stop shopping typically doesn't come to fruition." More often than not, he says he finds better returns via the combined labors of several boutique-like agencies.

Filling that kind of need is a strategy many independent firms have found effective. Through informal affiliations and through networking organizations, smaller shops are starting to pool their resources in order to broaden their expertise and to extend their geographic

Help On The Way: PR Alliances

Looking to partner up on a project? These organizations coordinate voluntary affiliations among agencies open to collaborating for clients:

- **The Independent Public Relations Collaborative**
c/o Jody Aud, The Prio Group, 410.549.7600
www.independentpr.com
- **Worldcom - Public Relations Group**
www.worldcomgroup.com
212.286.9550
- **PR Consultants Group**
www.prconsultantsgroup.com
info@prconsultantsgroup.com

reach. What's more, the alliances, which are much flatter and have fewer hoops to jump

through, are increasing their appeal among corporate clients

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Book Excerpt: Olympic Buzz Harks To 'Gold' Standards For PR

Brits jumped for joy last week after London was awarded the 2012 Olympic Summer Games following an agonizing selection process. (Editor's Note: The celebrations were marred the very next day after terrorists exploded four bombs on London's subway and bus systems, murdering, at press time, at least 50 people and wounding at least 700 people.) China, meanwhile, is well into the planning stages – about \$30 billion worth – as the host of the 2008 Summer Games. Shelley Bird, chief communications officer at NCR Corporation, had last year's Summer Games in Athens on her mind as she

talked about 'going for the gold,' communications-wise, for PR News' 2005 edition of "Lessons Learned From The PR Trenches." An excerpt follows:

Most of us can only marvel at the accomplishments of the young athletes in Athens at the 2004 Summer Olympics, but none of us is too old or too out of shape to benefit from a gold medalist's mindset. While natural talent plays a role in any endeavor, winning athletes will tell you that, to come out on top, you need razor-sharp focus, unyielding discipline and thorough preparation.

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PR Alliances Ascend

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who are increasingly disillusioned by the bigger firms tendency to over-promise and under-deliver.

At the nine-person **Deveney Communication** (New Orleans), founder John Deveney cooks up the PR for national dining chain Ruth's **Chris Steak House**. It's a huge gig for a small shop, but Deveney doesn't work alone.

For example, Ruth's Chris recently opened a new branch in Virginia Beach, Va., a long haul from the Big Easy, so Deveney brought in reinforcements. Working through **PR Consultants Group**, a national network of independent firms, he tapped local PR pro Lisa Mullins to coordinate the effort on the ground in Virginia. "This way, we had someone in the market who could look at our plans and look at our media pitches from the point of view of someone who knew the market intimately, who knew the editors and who knew the local media," Deveney says.

Another instance: Cathy Dunkin, president and CEO of **The Standing Partnership**, a \$2.4 million PR agency in St. Louis, pulled together a team of six firms from **Worldcom Public Relations Group**, a global consortium of independent PR companies, to help serve client Maritz Inc., whose diverse interests include travel/tourism, financial services and pharmaceuticals. "With Worldcom, we can bring together very specific expertise in each of these industries, so the client gets really high-level thought leadership in each of these areas," Dunkin says.

Six different organizations serving a single account? Sounds like a managerial nightmare, but Dunkin insists looks can be deceiving. She manages projects through a central team in her own office "and then we add in team people from other offices which add value," she says.

Central billing is a key component of PR partnerships. Almost without exception, these teaming efforts include a lead player who bills the client. All other agencies bill that project leader, thus sparing the client the hassle of seeing multiple invoices for a

MINDING YOUR Ps AND Qs OF PR PARTNERSHIPS

Paul Oakley, Dow Chemical Co.'s North American communications leader for plastics, is quick to extol the notion of having multiple agencies tackle a PR project together. But, he keeps a tight hold on the reins.

► While each project has a lead team, Oakley still keeps in direct contact with every agency working on the assignment/campaign. "It's my responsibility as the custodian of the Dow brand and the dollars we are spending to monitor our reputation strategy. I want to make sure that I understand who is doing what and why we are doing it."

► Not everyone can play. Oakley maintains a 'preferred provider' list of agencies that he says are qualified to do Dow's PR work. When agencies need to collaborate, they work off that list to find partners.

single piece of work.

However, for the system to work effectively, everyone's got to be on the same page. That means talking upfront about project goals and timelines, budgets, strategies and the division of labor. It also can mean building bridges in advance, even before the call comes in.

"You have to be sure you are compatible in terms of personality and work style, in addition to your skill base," says Jeanette Darnauer of the five-person **Darnauer Group** in Aspen, Colo.

Darnauer entered into just such a relationship recently with Denver's venerable Johntson Wells agency, but she did not do so lightly. She first met with the founder and then with the agency leadership. When a bid opportunity came up, she proceeded to sit down with the project team — all this before engaging in any actual work. All told, it took the two sides about 18 months to cement the terms of their alliance.

Why go to such trouble? "I wanted to grow faster, and I wanted bigger clients," Darnauer says. "One of the downsides of being in a small town is that you get pigeonholed as someone who only works on a local or regional level, so I thought I needed to take a major departure from my past business practices."

While Darnauer took the slow-and-selective approach to choose her partner, others

don't have that luxury. Want to work for Dow Chemical? Paul Oakley will hand you a list of PR agencies with which you can collaborate. "Dow Chemical has a strict purchasing mentality, in that we have a preferred vendors list. That is cost-effective for us, and it ensures that institutional knowledge stays within a limited number of companies," Oakley says.

No problem, says Terri Howe, who as president of **Howe Marketing Communications** in Grand Rapids, Mich., works frequently on Dow projects. Howe's tip for making these partnerships work: working together means, well, working together and not just lip service.

"We had one instance where an experiment didn't work," Howe adds. "One agency handled content development on a piece of literature, and another agency worked on the creative. That ended up being a difficult situation. It was hard to tell where the ownership was." **PRN**

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Almost without exception, these teaming efforts include a lead player who bills the client. All other agencies bill that project leader, thus sparing the client the hassle of seeing multiple invoices for a single piece of work.

