

‘The Science Behind The Art’

(Exclusive to *PR News* from the Institute for Public Relations)

Facing Facts: PR vs. Advertising Credibility

No matter how many times you’ve heard it – and how much you want to believe it – there is no known research to support the claim that PR-generated media coverage is worth two or three times the coverage garnered by advertising.

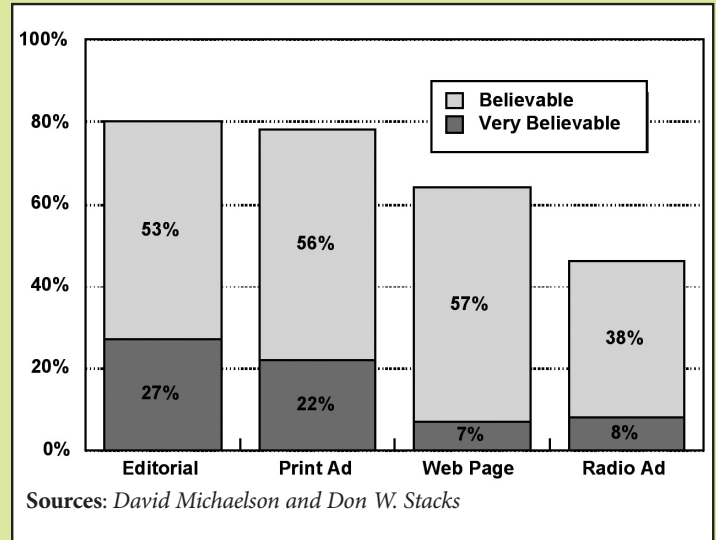
The claim usually is attributed to the supposed greater credibility of news columns when compared to ads. David Michaelson, principal of **David Michaelson & Company LLC**, and Don W. Stacks, a professor at the **University of Miami**, set out to establish some real knowledge on this subject. With funding from PRtrak, the two researchers compared the impact of editorial coverage, print advertising, Web pages and radio advertising on factors relating to purchase decisions.

Specifically, they looked at consumer differences in message recall, credibility, product rating and interest. The experimental study involved a hypothetical product coupled with students whose media use had been determined to be no different than that of the general population.

Overall, the researchers found no statistically significant differences between editorial and advertising on any variable. In particular, PR-generated coverage and print advertising enjoyed equal credibility, and both scored higher than Web pages and radio advertising.

Should PR professionals be disappointed with this news? Not at all, say the researchers. First, the results suggest there is an advantage to delivering product messages through a variety of channels. Furthermore, with PR-generated publicity being the clear equivalent of advertising, it bolsters the argument for shifting more resources to PR, which traditionally has operated with much smaller budgets.

HOW CREDIBLE IS THE MESSAGE?



Editorial coverage and print advertising are statistically equal, and both are ahead of Web pages and radio advertising, in terms of believability.

Michaelson and Stacks are members of the Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation, an initiative of the Institute for Public Relations. They plan to expand their research in this area during the coming year. Additional research by these authors is available free at www.instituteforpr.com.

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Please Change The Subject: Cutting Through E-Mail Clutter

You can’t win for losing. Despite regularly voiced complaints from reporters, editors, *et al.*, that their inboxes are flooded with e-mail, 59% of the 147,900 media pros who responded to a recent **Bacon’s Information** survey said they wanted to get story pitches from PR professionals electronically (*see chart*). Wacky? You bet, but for PR pros journalists are the gatekeepers.

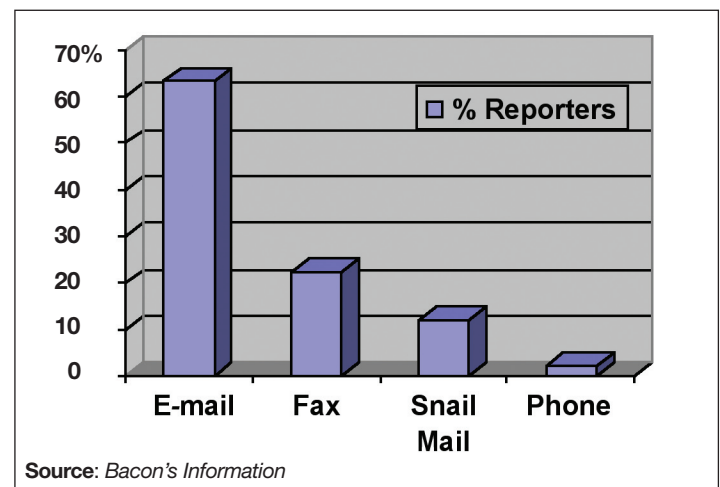
It’s not much of a mystery why so many e-mails get nuked: lame subject lines that fail to communicate what the story is about. “I think it’s a re-education,” says Ruth McFarland, senior VP/publisher of Bacon’s Information, who adds that she receives several messages everyday from confused PR execs and frustrated reporters alike, wondering how to improve e-mail communications.

By making information accessible at first glance and writing subject lines that point to larger trends, executives instantly increase their chances of getting some feedback; while the suggestion sounds glib, senior PR execs have yet to strike a balancing act between word quality and word quantity. Researching reporters’ beats and sending releases to the right people cannot be underestimated, either, as the courtesy of forwarding e-mails to the proper recipient is being replaced by a more convenient alternative: the delete button. **PRN**

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Save The Date: August 9, *PR News* Webinar, “Advanced Crisis Management: From Fire Fighting to Fire Prevention.” For more information, go to prnewsonline.com/webinars.