

# PUBLIC RELATIONS TACTICS

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## MARCHING TOWARD ATLANTA

If you haven't made plans for Oct. 27-30, clear your calendar now! You will want to be in Atlanta for PRSA's 2001 International Conference. In addition to the significant attractions of Atlanta, attendees will be treated to an annual conference with an energetic, updated format and 40 percent more professional development sessions. *Preview, page 25.*



## NEWS & VIEWS

# The Power Of Emotion

By Kelli B. Newman, APR

Technology has catapulted viewer expectations for video programming, both in visual effects and audio enhancement. Today's technological capabilities are also potent temptations to producers. Given an adequate budget, it's hard to resist incorporating layer upon layer of moving graphics, digital sound design and computer animation. But don't overlook the age-old power of emotion in conveying your messages and affecting viewer behaviors and opinions.

The way we feel is interdependent with our thought processes and behaviors.

"Emotions and feelings give significance and meaning to information," says Jennifer George, Ph.D., a professor of management and psychology at Rice University. "They serve as important signals of what's important and significant. Without the emotional value of feelings, people have a hard time making choices or decisions."

In fact, Dr. Antonio R. Damasio, a leading researcher in neuroscience and head of the department of neurology at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, draws an intimate connection between emotion and comprehension. His research with "somatic markers" has focused on explaining how emotions are biologically indispensable to our ability to make decisions.

Researchers have also studied the impact emotions have on recall. When intense emotion is attached to something, whether good or bad, it sears itself into our memory. How many of us remember exactly what we were doing when we heard about the bombing in Oklahoma City, or received that landmark job offer that set our careers into motion? The emotions we associate with a song can instantly transport us back to a particular moment, or memory of a special someone, each time we hear it played.

"Intense emotions interrupt our thought process, direct our attention, and direct our actions," says George. And directing action is at the core of a successful video program.

Certainly there are some subjects that lend themselves more obviously to emotion than others; for instance, a fund-raising video for a camp that serves special-needs children, or a marketing video for a heart center that saves lives every day. But don't be fooled into thinking these opportunities don't present their own challenges. Just as audiences today expect and are more accepting of sophisticated production values, they can also detect insincerity, exploitation and manufactured compassion from miles away.

Special care must be given to composing the script of an obviously emotional program. It requires writing from the heart and, like an effective speech writer, the ability to fully assume the perspective of the video's subject. Still, the best scriptwriter in the world can't conjure up the magic that comes from people who are passionate about what they are saying. That's why sound bites from a subject's beneficiaries are so dynamic, and sincere. A mother who tearfully credits a hospital's surgeons with saving her child's life, as she cradles that child in her arms, conveys the purest of emotions and accomplishes much more than any empathetic narration could hope to project.

But let's say you need a video for the annual stockholders meeting for Acme Widgets. Where is the emotion in that? In every seminar I attended given by the late Pat Jackson, APR, Fellow PRSA, he advocated the practice of behavioral public relations. In our experience, employee pride,

health-care client who wanted a video to explain the services of a pediatric critical care unit. The unit's function, skills and accomplishments had traditionally been overshadowed by the larger organization to which it belonged, and there were several internal, as well as external, audiences that needed educating. The approach we took in telling our client's story put a face to a larger issue in debate at the state legislature at that time — the health-care coverage needs of chronically ill children. Since that category of patient was prominently featured in our program, the video was requested by other organizations to use in their meetings with individual legislators and the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. They used the video to portray some of the medical challenges faced by 1.4 million uninsured children in Texas who would benefit from a proposed Children's Health Insurance Plan, or CHIP. (On March 11, 1999, the bill was unanimously approved by the Texas Senate and has subsequently been implemented.)

What issues can you put a face to? Perhaps your company has voluntarily enacted stringent environmental codes ahead of everyone else in your industry. The emotional components of that story fit well into any number of video applications and, consequently, offer the potential for limitless opportunities.

Emotion is a powerful way of conveying messages and affecting viewer behaviors and opinions. The motto our firm abides by is "Don't just give them words, give them an experience" — an emotional experience that tells viewers not only what they should know, but tells them what to feel. 🍷

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brand loyalty and new-client enthusiasm are just a few of the behaviors that can result from introducing emotion into a less obvious subject.

Music is a particularly effective tool in inspiring emotion. Motivating or reflective, with the right music, a truck transporting goods down the highway can be emotionally effective. But, again, be wary of trite or forced emotions. If it's not genuine for the viewer, it will do you more harm than good.

The persuasive powers of emotion can also enhance a project's opportunities for "unintentional consequences." A good example of this is a program our firm produced for a

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