

How Do You Measure Public Relations Success?

Two years ago, Adelphia Communications, the sixth largest cable operation in America, stole the front-page headlines, with stories, sidebars and full-color photos racking up over 143 column inches of free space in a single issue of *The New York Times*.

This July, John J. Rigas, Adelphia's founder, was headlined again. However, this time, the follow-up, "2 Guilty In Fraud At A Cable Giant," ran down a single column, directly below a colored shot of Kenneth L. Lay, former Enron chief, being led into a Houston court, hands cuffed behind his back.

That day, the Rigas' story of conspiracy and fraud, reportedly tipping the \$2.3 billion mark, dropped to a mere 102 column inches. Meanwhile, his newly-charged, scene-stealing competitor, "Lay Pleads Not Guilty," tallied 164 column inches in stories appearing in the business section. The coverage talked about 11 felonies filed by the Justice Department.

Not to be outdone, certainly not by men, Martha Stewart nailed the headlines just one week later with her vow, "I'll Be Back." Her defiant sound-bite, plus a little lying to federal investigators about "a small personal matter" that netted her a mere \$51,000 in profit, resulted in a whopping 251 column inches of free space with a myriad of color photos and illustrations about her life and lifestyle in the July 17 issue of *The New York Times*.

So, when it comes to measuring public relations success, did Martha win?

If PR success is measured only in clippings, in column inches - and using only the three examples cited above, Martha won.

If measured in what's called "ad value equivalency," Martha still won.

In yesterday's dollars, Adelphia's column inches at the open rate for advertising in the New York regional edition alone was worth over \$140,000 in ad equivalency value.

In today's dollars, Martha's column inches doubles Adelpia's ad equivalency value to over \$290,000 in the New York regional edition, with Lay's calculated ad equivalency value \$100,000 short of Martha's.

In the nationwide edition of *The New York Times*, Martha beats again, with her ad equivalency value topping \$324,000. That's with no discounts, no plea bargains, no breaks.

So, when determining PR success, Martha wins?

Yes, if one equates PR success with by-the-ruler visibility.

If not, then the winner is none of the above. Instead, the winner is the businessman or woman, who always tries to follow the footsteps of success, but draws the line at wearing jumpsuit orange, prison blues or an electronic ankle bracelet.

That person measures PR success within the context of the law, corporate responsibility, good citizenship, ethical leadership.

Those winners may never appear in *The New York Times*. But they may hit the front page of their local newspaper, be featured on a radio or TV talk show, be photographed for a company newsletter or singled out for recognition at a local Chamber celebration.

Or not.

But for sure they and their responsible, caring reputation will pop up in their neighborhood's over-the-back-fence newspaper, also known as "word of mouth."

In the race for PR success, "word of mouth" always wins.

PR Column for Small Business, *The Hour*, July 27, 2004

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