

Eye-Catching Studies Propel Messages

Eye-catching studies propel messages into the headlines, and in some cases, even continue to keep them there.

In April, 2002, The Clorox Company headlined its release “First In-Office Study Dishes The Dirt On Desks,” with a sub-head “Researchers Find Average Desk Harbors 400 Times More Bacteria Than Average Toilet Seat.”

The release, distributed by Market Wire, highlighted the “Bacteria Buster” findings by University of Arizona germ guru Dr. Charles Gerba. One such finding was that bacteria levels took a free-fall jump off a steep cliff, as in a 99.9% drop, if surfaces were treated with disinfecting wipes once a day.

Of course, that meant a pithy paragraph about Clorox Disinfecting Wipes, as a proven, effective killer of flu viruses, Staph and Salmonella bacteria, became totally appropriate as newsworthy.

Three years later, the study’s message is still making its way into headlines, such as “School Drinking Fountains Carry Far More Bacteria Than toilet Seats,” BloggingBaby.com; “You Can Find More Germs on a Desktop than a Toilet Seat,” ABC News 20/20; and “Toilet Seats Often Cleaner Than Your Desk At Work,” ThePlumber.com, to name a few.

Bricks, as headline material, have not fared as well as germs.

In 2004, the Brick Industry Association headlined its new study, “Shelter from the Storm.” The two-year study, conducted by the Wind Science and Engineering Research Center, proved the-three-little-pigs theory correct. A house built of bricks offered “dramatically more

protection” from wind-blown debris than a house built of vinyl or fiber-cement siding.

The research was riveting with a 7.5 foot long 2 x4 penetrating homes at 25 mph, except for brick houses. The projectile needed to exceed 80 mph to damage the brick.

The subsequent headlines ranged from “Hurricane Guidelines: Home Featuring Brick Veneer Far Exceeds Strictest Hurricane Standards,” MasonContractors.org to “Brick Stands Up to the Big Bad Wolf and Hurricane,” Landscapeonline.com.

One year later, in October, the Brick Industry issued a new release via Business Wire, headlined “Which Building Materials Best Protect Your Home?” The release was a brief, two-sentence hook, with a direct link to an audio news release via Newstream.com.

The audio script, taking a daring leap into Hurricane Katrina’s wake, referred to its “recent study” and offered four quick tips to help homes “stand up to damaging winds.”

Unfortunately, the top-of-the-search-engine headlines, reinforced by mind-shattering photos, defiantly challenge bricks’ reputation, e.g., “A Car Crushed by Bricks,” Katrinahelp.com; “A Rubble of Bricks,” cclockwood.com/stockimages; “Hurricane Katrina: Just a Gumbo of Wood and Bricks and Mortar,” thelutheran.org; and “Photo Gallery: Hurricane Katrina,” *National Geographic News*.

Fortunately, one stand-out, Homebuilders.com, much like the third little pig, is steadfast in its belief that brick ranks high as a strong, house-building material and consequently cites the study on its site.

“The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report,” has not only propelled its message into the headlines but it is changing attitudes.

The study, commissioned by Dove, an Unilever brand, involved 3,200 women in ten

countries. Their most startling fact headlined their release, generating over 85 national stories in such publications as *Women's Wear Daily*, *People* and *USA Today*.

The headline - "Only Two Percent of Women Describe Themselves as Beautiful."

The study alone provoked debate but Dove didn't stop there. Instead, they launched "real beauty" ads, depicting "six real women in panties and bras in their unretouched glory."

To further churn the waters, mobile billboards were strategically located in major cities, with intent to challenge women's notions of beauty by encouraging them to cast their votes. One such site is Times Square in New York, where the wrinkled face of Irene Sinclair, age 95, London, England, dares to ask, "Will society ever accept old can be beautiful?" A running tally will be kept of the votes.

That wasn't enough. A special website, www.campaignforrealbeauty.com, was created to post ongoing dialog, plus kick-off panel discussions were scheduled around the country, all keeping the study alive in the public's eye.

During a recent PRWeek webcast, "REAL IMPACT: Dove's Real Beauty Campaign," Stacie Bright, Senior Marketing Communications Manager, Unilever, reported, "I think we're really changing how people think."

No one is expecting a small business owner to conduct major studies or change attitudes on a national scale. However, with a little ingenuity, studies can help generate headlines for small business and even change attitudes, though perhaps on a much smaller scale.

For example, the pet store or hardware store owner can tally how many bags of bird seed they sell in December from one year to the next. The report, along with a few tips for the birds during January's cold, and an eye-catching headline, could find its way into a local newspaper,

in-house newsletter, quick email to customers or website posting.

Further, if a business owner belongs to an industry's association, he might check out the national website in search of a fetching study. The findings, localized, might tantalize a headline-hungry editor in the local or regional press.

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