

CORNERING THE MARKET: LESSONS FROM INDUSTRY ABOUT SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

BY

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ABSTRACT

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CORNERING THE MARKET: LESSONS FROM INDUSTRY ABOUT SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

INTRODUCTION

In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. Abraham Lincoln, 1858¹

We all remember television commercials with the Maytag repairman — the poor guy who sat there waiting for the phone to ring. But it never did. The purpose of the commercial was, of course, to shape public opinion about the reliability of Maytag appliances and encourage consumers to buy them. Corporate America is in the business of shaping public opinion to achieve desired results which are presumably greater sales and market share. How about Old Joe Camel of cigarette fame? Introduced in 1988, Old Joe was extremely effective with the targeted young male smoker population, resulting in a near doubling of sales among the 18-to 24-year-olds in three years. Unfortunately, he was also effective with children under 13. Six-year-olds recognized Joe nearly as much as Mickey Mouse, which ultimately led to his premature demise in 1997².

The Army has also recognized a need to shape public opinion. Familiar are the themes *Be All You Can Be*, *An Army of One*, and now *Army Strong*, used in recruiting efforts aimed at the enlistment-eligible population. Army senior leadership has recognized a need to more effectively communicate strategic themes as well. Spearheading this effort is the Office of Public Affairs, in conjunction with the recently established Strategic Communication Coordination Group (SCCG). Their goal is to unify Army strategic communication in support of The Army Plan.³

The intent of this research effort was to explore Army efforts to shape public opinion via strategic communication and contrast them with efforts by industry to do the same, with the goal of identifying common themes and determining if they are present in the Army's approach. Before delving into specific cases and approaches, it is important to develop an understanding of opinion shaping in general and the Army's strategic communications environment.

BACKGROUND

The Need to Shape Public Opinion

Corporate America is in the business of managing public opinion because it's in the business of staying in business. Without sustained interest in its brands and products, a company's market share declines and profits along with it. The need to shape public opinion also exists for entities, public and private, that have strong opinions about how things should be that they want others to share. Public opinion can be influenced by means as simple as commercials on radio and television, or through deliberate, sustained rhetoric voiced by an organization's leaders.

Polling (or surveying) is a means of assessing and shaping public opinion. Polls assess public opinion by revealing how respondents feel about issues, and help shape public opinion by providing the basis for policy decisions — either “yes, we should do this” or “no, we shouldn't” — because of how the public feels. Polls also provide a rationale for advertising a particular point of view to alter a target audience's majority opinion.

Some fear that over reliance on polls can cause government policy decisions to follow rather than lead poll results, but research has shown that this isn't necessarily the case.⁴ American public opinion is surprisingly consistent on a number of key issues and not necessarily in agreement with foreign policy goals.⁵ Of note are Americans' opinions on military strength and the use of force, which favor using the military to combat terrorism, conduct humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, fight drug lords, and ensure the supply of oil.⁶

Government efforts to shape opinion are not new. Concerted efforts were made in World War II (WWII) to establish offices to coordinate and control the ever-increasing flow of information beginning with the Division of Information in 1941 and undergoing multiple restructurings and reorganizations throughout the war and ever since.⁷ More recently, the Department of Defense (DoD) established the position of deputy assistant secretary of defense (joint communication) (DASD[JC]) in December 2005 to shape DoD-wide process, policy, doctrine, organization and training of the primary communication-support capabilities. The DoD also established a joint structure called

the Joint Forces Command-based Joint Public Affairs Support Element (JPASE) to support the integration of warfighter training, develop operation public communication doctrine, programs, and policies for the warfighter, and to give the combatant commander a rapidly deployable military public affairs capability.⁸ The latest chapter in this evolution of government roles and responsibilities is a State Department policy paper published in June 2007 entitled, “US National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication,” which attempts to clarify US public diplomacy (referred to as “waging peace”) strategic objectives and audiences, priorities, and required communication activities and interagency coordination.⁹

For government and industry, efforts to gauge and/or shape opinion are sometimes successful and sometimes not. Consider, for instance, heavily funded Kuwaiti government efforts in 1990 to rally US support and force against Iraqi, which appear to have been largely successful.¹⁰ The outcomes of Operations Desert Shield and Storm are well known. In contrast, New Coke, which was introduced in 1985 after two years and \$4 million of research and abundant advertising, was a colossal failure and replaced by Coke Classic after a three-month hiatus. What actually went “wrong” with New Coke will be explored in more detail later.¹¹

Strategic Communication and How It Is Implemented

Strategic Communication Defined

Strategic communication is efforts to mold, shape, and define public opinion. Joint Publication JP 5-0, Joint Operations Planning, defines strategic communication as

Focused US Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of US Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.¹²

In this sense, strategic communication is, itself, an instrument of national power.

In more practical terms, strategic communication is “a way of persuading other people to accept one’s ideas, policies, or courses of action.”¹³ At the national level, this

entails persuading the nation's citizens to support the policies of their leaders so that a national will is forged to accomplish national objectives.

Strategic communication components include vision and mission statements, organizational values and beliefs, target audience identification, message development, feedback loops. The following key elements are also essential:¹⁴

- An understanding of the target audience and how to reach it
- Research into past media coverage and public opinion about the issues
- Messages to be delivered
- Materials to be produced
- Financial resources from which staff and equipment will be drawn
- A written work plan

Strategic communication has been equated to the principle of war called *mass*, in that it means massing information among all agents of public information at a critical time and place to accomplish a specific objective.¹⁵ The principle of *simplicity* applies as well, in that simple messages frequently repeated by all levels of an organization are more likely to be effective than complex messages intended only for special occasions or audiences.

The Strategic Communication Environment

Media involvement is a critical aspect of strategic communication. Research has shown public opinion in a variety of industries to be heavily influenced through media coverage, both favorable and unfavorable. Not surprisingly, the greater the media coverage, the stronger the corresponding opinion about that industry, as long as some minimum level of coverage is provided.¹⁶ Beyond sheer volume of coverage, the mechanics of coverage also matter. A study involving print media coverage of a particular environmental issue showed that even when individual articles on the topic contained mostly accurate information, factors such as article content, language, and page placement skewed the audience's understanding of the facts.¹⁷ These findings show that media content is a strong shaper of public opinion and that viewpoints presented "first with the most" is more likely to sway the public debate.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, all media coverage is not created equal. As much as one would like to believe that the news segments seen or heard on radio and television are completely factual and balanced, they may not be. “News releases” generated by marketing and public relations (PR) firms to promote the interests of sponsoring industries or groups, such as efforts to portray normal medical conditions as widespread and severe (baldness, for example), would fall into this category.¹⁹ This type of media exposure is not all bad and can be used to publicize an industry’s active role in taking on major issues.²⁰ Similarly, industry-funded market-shaping research can add to the current state of understanding of a giving topic and demonstrate an interest in more than profit.²¹ The important point here is that all that is seen and heard in the media is not merely due to diligent investigative reporting.

By some estimates, as much as 40% or more of what we believe to be “news” is instead the result of PR efforts specifically intended to shape our thinking.²² Clients pay PR firms for this type of exposure and rely on the media to apply some form of editorial judgment to maintain the credibility of the PR firm and the reporter. If news releases are passed along without judgment, the credibility of both source and recipient suffer.²³ In this context the distinctions between advertising, which is paid media with a controlled message, and public relations, which is the opposite, are subtle but significant. Both advertising and public relations are important shapers of public opinion.

Beyond traditional media outlets, the strategic communication arena has grown more complicated with the emergence of Internet news sites, blogs, and a myriad of other means that influence public opinion ever faster. To illustrate this point, on September 12, 2007, the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum with the subject, “Implementation of the DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan.” By October 1, it was posted to the worldwide web and had garnered almost immediate comment.

It is an interesting document, but the section on communication with the American people is laughable. Based on this, it is no wonder that Afghanistan is quickly becoming the new forgotten war.²⁴

This harsh critique highlights the high stakes involved in strategic communication. That strategic communication is viewed as an essential element of national leadership raises the ante even further.²⁵

Compounding these challenges is the absence of a critical element in US strategic communication — a message driven by agreed upon national values.²⁶ Even Congress doesn't appear to fully understand the significance of strategic communication. Recent House Appropriates Committee and Senate Armed service Committee language denied fiscal year 2008 funds for the DoD's strategic communication plans. The House committee cited "procedural issues" as a rationale, while the Senate committee expressed concerns that fusing the components of strategic communication — public diplomacy, public affairs, and information operations — would compromise the integrity of each of the entities.²⁷

Another challenge in national-level strategic communication is the erroneous notion that all people are rational actors who would basically think like Americans if they could just be pragmatic.²⁸ To illustrate this point, a recent survey of more than one thousand 18-to 22-year-old major university students in Jordan indicated that a strong majority associated democracy with King Abdullah II, a monarch, rather than with freedom or liberty as Americans might. The same population almost unanimously associated terrorism with the United States, Israel, and George W. Bush rather than Osama Bin Laden.²⁹

The Science of Public Opinion

Research has shown that public opinion is heavily influenced by elite discourse on a matter. When such discussion one-sidedly favors a given policy, a mainstream pattern results, in which the most informed members of the public tend to support the mainstream and thus the elite opinion.³⁰ A mixed message divided along partisan lines tends to generate polarize mass opinion. Many other factors influence public opinion and attempts to assess it to include age, political predisposition, core values and/or beliefs, what thoughts are foremost during an interview, how questions are framed and posed, and, perhaps most important, political awareness.

Unfortunately, most Americans are lacking in this category and can be considered rationally ignorant about politics. They pay just enough attention to learn something about events in the public debate, but not necessarily enough to remember what they have understood, even about prominent events, or to be able to respond critically to the political messages they encounter.³¹ Instead, their opinions vary depending upon whatever current information manages to develop the greatest intensity in their awareness. The remainder of Americans' political awareness ranges from a small percentage that have virtually no current information to an attentive, highly-informed minority that respond to new issues mainly on the basis of the partisanship and ideology of elite message sources.³² Consequently, those who are involved in the public debate — primarily elites and the media — have a disproportionately large influence over the rest of the population.

Most public opinion research fails to account for these vast differences in political awareness.³³ By default then, most efforts to shape public opinion likely fail to account for them as well. As shown previously in the environmental example, this awareness is greatly influenced by information content, wording, and placement, which are similarly influenced by elite discourse on a matter. Audiences can reach a variety of conclusions depending upon how information is presented, and those who are less attentive to public affairs are more likely to believe what they hear, again a function of elite discourse, and less likely to reach an accurate conclusion.

Perhaps a practical example of these phenomena in a context relevant to the military is the measure of youth propensity to serve in the military, which has diminished sharply over the last year and is expected to continue to decrease.³⁴ That support for the war in Iraq has also declined over the same period raises many questions.³⁵ Among them, is propensity to serve truly a measure the likelihood of individuals to serve in the military, or is more accurately a measure of public sentiment toward the war? Further, how has public sentiment toward the war been influence by elite discourse and media treatment? The only way to learn the answers to these and similarly difficult questions would be to ask a series of questions to determine why the survey participants feel the way that they do.

Interestingly, public support for the war in Iraq has mirrored that of the Vietnam War. Support was strong in the early stages of US involvement in Vietnam when the conflict was framed as a struggle to preserve freedom by containing Communism, a theme frequently echoed in news stories. Later, as journalists began to present information in ways suggesting that the conflict was essentially a civil war among Vietnamese factions, not essential to US security interests, and perhaps not winnable, public support for the war began to wane.³⁶ In the current conflict then, it is no surprise that as public support for the war has waned over time, so has youth propensity to serve.

Molding Public Opinion Through Strategic Message Campaigns

Molding public opinion on any subject involves several steps. These include clearly defining the campaign objectives, clearly identifying the public or publics to be influenced, carefully surveying relevant attitudes and opinions about the campaign objectives and programs, and analyzing the survey data to find out *why* people hold the views that they do. This last step is probably both the most important and most difficult.³⁷

For PR campaign messages in a public affairs environment to be effective, they must evoke emotional rather than rational responses in an audience by connecting in a meaningful way to their values. For the greatest effect, both a policy and its supporting public relations message must connect with those values or the effort is not likely to succeed.³⁸ PR messages cannot be islands, but must relate to a tangible goal that excites the audience and be framed in a way that gives the goal meaning.

Key questions that must be answered when developing PR campaign goals and messages included the following:³⁹

- What is an organization's core mission?
- What are the values that underpin the mission?
- Who are the stakeholders and what are their needs and interests?
- In previous outreach efforts, what garnered the most attention from the stakeholders and media?

Campaign strategies for communicating strategic messages should include establishing and organizing for the express purpose of carrying on the campaign,

developing a complete, sound argument based upon fact, developing a strategy of persuasion that goes beyond the facts and motivates by addressing the emotional and psychological underpinnings of the issue, and publicity. In particular, publicity techniques should:⁴⁰

- Be adapted to the message and target audience.
- Be properly timed and coordinated.
- Be related to the target audience's attitudes and desires when possible.
- Be dramatic.
- Make use of existing leaders and group channels of communication.
- Employ speedy communication aids, such as slogans clichés, and symbols.
- Be repetitious.
- Use action and word pictures and symbols.
- Stress the public significance of the message.
- Relate to current events of higher attention value.

Army Strategic Communication

The success of an army depends upon its morale, and its morale depends in very large part upon the morale of the people at home who support it. Nothing can undermine this morale, both of the army and of the people behind it so rapidly and so thoroughly as the feeling that they are being deceived; that they are not being given the real facts about their progress and the progress of the cause which they are preparing to defend. Secretary of War Henry Stimson, 1941⁴¹

The Army has developed a strategic communication process, first by establishing a strategic communication team in the Office of the Director of the Army Staff in 2004, then by consolidating all responsibility for planning, funding, and contract support within the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs in April 2005.⁴² Roles and responsibilities were clarified in July 2006 with the establishment of the Strategic Communication Coordination Group (SCCG), whose mission is to unify Army strategic communication in support of The Army Plan.⁴³ In November 2006, the Secretary of the Army and Army Chief of Staff went a step further and established a 3+2+1 Communication Engagement strategy for general officers and senior executive service (SES) civilians.⁴⁴ This strategy, which is intended to keep the American public informed while making a strong case for

the Army, directs the routine engagement of multiple public audiences each quarter — three direct-encounter outreach events with the public, two commercial news media interviews, and one internally oriented news media interview. Most recently, in April 2007 the current Army Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey, established seven initiatives, one of which is to “improve strategic communications both internally and externally.”⁴⁵

The Army Knowledge Online (AKO) homepage contains a link to the Army 2007 Strategic Communication Guide, which is maintained online at the Senior Army Leader page and the AKO Public Affairs Knowledge Center.⁴⁶ This resource is a “core communication guide” that “enables unity of effort through consistent communication planning and provides source information on our strategic initiatives.”⁴⁷ It is also designed to “supplement organizational communication plans while conducting essential dialogue with our Soldiers, the American people, Congress, and other stakeholders whom the Army serves and are relied upon for support.”⁴⁸ As stated in the Strategic Communication Guide, the desires of the Army strategic communication effort are to: attract, retain, and sustain a quality all-volunteer force; gain and maintain public trust, confidence, and active support for the Army; gain and maintain public and congressional support for resourcing the Army; and gain and maintain a well-informed community of soldiers Army civilians, and family members.⁴⁹ Other resource links available on this website include the following:

- The Strategic Environment
- The Army Vision and Mission
- Army Imperatives
- Strategic Talking Points
- 3 + 2 + 1
- Army Core Objectives
- Dimensions of Telling the Story
- Achieving the Desired Effects
- The Army Theme: “America’s Army: The Strength of the Nation”
- Army Outreach

- Helpful Army Websites

The Senior Army Leader Page (SALP) on AKO also provides links to a number of enabling resources to include the current Army Thematic Guidance, Strategic Communication Guide, Posture Statement, and Game Plan, as well as Strategic Communication Priorities and Themes and Strategic Communication Areas of Interest. The SALP serves as a communications resource for senior Army leaders, officers, and civilians for the active and reserve components, and provides a central point for information from the Army leadership.⁵⁰ It is intended as a reference tool to help Army leaders speak with one voice and also provides background information on key topics to assist in understanding the Army's position.⁵¹ However, SALP access is restricted to Army Senior Leaders in the ranks of General Officer, Colonel, and Senior Executive Service (SES).

Execution of the Army's strategic communication plan falls largely to senior leaders at the flag officer level. Engagements are coordinated through SCCG and focus primarily upon legislative opportunities in Washington, DC, involving Congress. Other engagement opportunities are coordinated in conjunction with the 3+2+1 strategy and are available through a link on the SCCG website, along with the exhortation that "every Soldier, civilian, and family member affiliated with the Army has a story about the Army to tell... ...your job is to tell the story."⁵² However, there appear to be few resources and little practical means for anyone other than senior Army leaders to participate in these outreach opportunities, and no means of ensuring consistency in purpose, focus and content.

Within the US Army Accessions Command (USAAC), the US Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) also plays a significant role in strategic communication in that recruiting campaigns and the recruiters who execute them are probably the most visible link to those who are not already associated with the Army. USAREC's goals include recruiting Soldiers, both officers and enlisted, to meet the needs of an expeditionary Army, beginning the transformation from civilian to Soldier, *acting as the Army's liaison with the American people*, and doing it all with integrity and a professionalism that clearly demonstrates the warrior ethos and Army values.⁵³ USAREC efforts, though, are

understandably focused toward the enlistment-eligible population and their influencers, and not toward the population at large.

There are a limited number of strategic communication resources available through ARMY.MIL, the official public Army website. These include the Army Game Plan, the Army Posture Statement, the Army Campaign Plan, and, surprisingly, even a “Call to Duty” (not Army Strong) Branding Toolkit — more on this later.⁵⁴

HOW INDUSTRY SHAPES PUBLIC OPINION THROUGH STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

Strategic Brand Management

Strategic brand management is the process of establishing a brand and growing brand value, or equity, in the minds of consumers. Strategic brand management is analogous to strategic communication, in that it involves the same principles for a different purpose. Rephrasing the earlier definition of strategic communication, strategic brand management can be thought of as:

Focused *corporate* efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of *corporate* interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products.⁵⁵

Much like the strategic communication process, the strategic brand management process involves the following steps:⁵⁶

1. Identifying and establishing brand positioning and values.
2. Planning and implementing brand marketing programs.
3. Measuring and interpreting brand performance.
4. Growing and sustaining brand equity.

Brand positioning refers to how a brand compares with competitors in the minds of consumers, and values are the attributes and benefits that characterize a brand. Brand marketing programs capitalize on the unique features and benefits of a brand. Brand performance and strength can be measured to assess strength relative to similar or competing brands through tools such as a value chain analysis and brand equity measurement.⁵⁷ A brand value chain traces the value creation process to better understand the financial impacts of marketing expenditures and investments, and brand equity measurement consists of research intended to provide marketers with timely, accurate information for both long-term strategic and short-term use. Both are tools to help position brands for strength and growth through brand equity management, which entails understanding how branding strategies should reflect corporate concerns and be adjusted over time, geographic boundaries, and market segments. Consumer-based brand

equity is grown and sustained by developing consumer familiarity of with brand through repeated exposure and experiences, and marketing programs that link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand in a consumer's mind to create a positive brand image. The more relevant, distinctive, and believable a brand association is to the consumer, the greater the brand equity and corresponding desirability of a product.⁵⁸

Branding

Branding is the process of establishing a company or product's identity in the minds of consumers and distinguishing it from other companies or products. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition."⁵⁹

Brand Elements

Brand elements are devices such as names, jingles, symbols, and packaging which identify and differentiate a brand and can be trademarked. Effective brand elements enhance brand awareness and facilitate strong, favorable, and unique brand associations.⁶⁰ As each element has unique strengths and weakness, they can be used in combination to achieve different objectives or be mutually supporting.

Key criteria for brand elements include the following:⁶¹

- Memorable.
- Inherently meaningful.
- Appealing and/or likeable.
- Transferable across product categories.
- Adaptable and flexible over time.
- Able to be legally protected.

Logos and slogans are particularly important brand elements and can enhance or detract from brand equity. Research has shown that consumer impressions of companies can vary depending upon whether or not a company's name is present with its logo, which doesn't always have a positive effect.⁶² Accordingly, logos must be carefully developed to ensure that they convey the intended consumer impressions and enhance

brand equity. Slogans are unique in that they can help consumers grasp the meaning of what makes a brand special in a few short words or phrases.⁶³

Brand equity can also be developed through secondary associations, such as where a product originated (e.g., Idaho potatoes), specific retailers (e.g., sold only at Sears), licensing (e.g., official supplier to NASCAR), and famous spokespeople (e.g., Campbell's chunky soup commercials featuring pro football players). By linking a brand to other entities with their own equity, consumers can expect that brand to demonstrate some of the same characteristics as the other entities. Secondary associations essentially borrow brand equity and transfer it to the featured brand in the minds of consumers.⁶⁴

Strategic Brand Management Communication

Just as there are many brand element possibilities, there are numerous options available for strategic marketing communication to build brand equity. These include advertising, promotions, event marketing and sponsorship, public relations and publicity, and personal selling. No single means is adequate for building brand equity, and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, effective marketing communication combines multiple techniques, each carefully evaluated as to its effectiveness in building brand equity and employed for a specific role. Effective marketing communication demonstrates a synergy where the overall impact is greater than the sum of the individual components.⁶⁵

Brand equity can be significantly affected by strategic marketing communication in crisis situations. As with the "first with the most" credo for strategic communication, swiftness and sincerity are key to averting brand disaster. Two examples that bear this out are Johnson & Johnson's (J&J's) handling of the 1982 Tylenol crisis and Perrier's response to reports of benzene in its bottled water in 1990.

In late September 1982, seven people died from tampered-with Extra Strength Tylenol capsules containing cyanide. Within the first week of the crisis, J&J had issued a worldwide medical alert, set up a 24-hour telephone hotline, analyzed product samples, briefed the Food and Drug Administration, offered a \$100,000 reward for apprehension of the criminal(s), began a voluntary recall, stopped advertising the product, began issuing weekly press releases, and began conducting weekly consumer tracking surveys.

Shortly thereafter, J&J introduced a widely publicized capsule exchange program and heavily aired a television ad aimed at restoring consumer confidence and featuring J&J's medical director. The highly publicized introduction of new, tamper-proof packing followed within weeks, as did distribution of 60 million "free Tylenol" coupons. A return to regular advertising followed shortly thereafter, and by February 1983, Tylenol sales had essentially returned to their pre-crisis level.⁶⁶ J&J's quick reaction and "first with the most" communication strategy clearly carried the day. In comparison, Perrier's guardedness during a less serious crisis had far worse results.

Perrier company executives in the US first learned of benzene contamination in its bottled drinking water in early February 1990. Within days, the French parent company, Source Perrier S.A., had issued a worldwide recall of the product. In contrast to J&J's well-managed crisis response, Perrier issued contradictory information while it sought to determine the source of the contamination. Initial reports attributed the benzene to improper cleaning of North American production line equipment, but a later news conference suggested that Perrier could be off the market for as long as three months, which was odd for a simple production line problem. After contamination was also found in Perrier bottles in Europe, company officials acknowledged for the first time that their "naturally sparkling" spring water actually included naturally occurring benzene that was filtered out as part of the bottling process, and that the contamination was due to workers failing to replace bottling line filters. Despite the damage this caused the company, the president of Source Perrier had the audacity to suggest that the publicity might help build the company's reputation. Five months after the initial recall (rather than the advertised three months) Perrier again became widely available in the United States. Even with promotions, special events, and a more than quadrupling of the marketing budget, by the end of 1990 Perrier sales had reached only 60 percent pre-recall levels. Its market share was less than half of what it had been the prior year, and Evian had become the top-selling imported bottle water in the US.⁶⁷ The old Army adage that "bad news doesn't better with time" certainly applies in this case.

Managing Brands Over Time

Long-term brand management requires long-term strategies. Short-term (tactical) decisions made to boost brand awareness or address near-term concerns may not promote long-term (strategic) brand equity unless they are tied into a greater strategy. A strategic brand-management perspective acknowledges that changes in brand marketing may affect the success of future marketing and considers both external and internal changes in the marketing environment. Brands may need to be reinforced, revitalized, retired, or migrated to other products in a portfolio to maintain brand equity in the face of changing market demands.⁶⁸

Internal Branding

Even though the majority of branding (and strategic communication) efforts focus on the external strategies and tactics that companies use to build or manage brand equity with the consumer, of equal importance is the concept of internal branding. Internal branding entails deliberate efforts to ensure that an organization's members understand branding fundamentals, and that their actions support the overarching brand management strategy. Successful internal branding integrates a variety of means to inform and inspire employees and should be a critical management priority.⁶⁹

The Best of Branding

Strong brands share common hallmarks. The following are some branding best practices.⁷⁰

1. Have a vision.
2. Create an emotional bond with customers.
3. Live the brand.
4. Create a company culture that protects and polishes your corporate brand.
5. Align your brand with your business.
6. Be bold.
7. Be consistent.
8. Communicate your corporate brand 360 degrees.
9. Own your industry's innovations.

10. Treasure your employees.
11. Build your brand equity on a budget.

Recognizing the Best in Marketing, Advertising, and Branding

A number of annual awards recognize superior performance in marketing, advertising, and branding. The David Ogilvy Research Excellence Awards sponsored by the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) recognize advertisers, agencies, and research companies that use innovative advertising research techniques and methods to demonstrate contributions to outstanding advertising campaigns.⁷¹ The Silver Anvil Awards sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) symbolize the forging of public opinion about a contemporary issue with exemplary professional skill, creativity and resourcefulness.⁷² The Effie awards honor the most effective communications practices in tackling marketplace challenges or Ideas that Work.⁷³ Databases from each of these awards are filled with winners' own submissions and provide countless examples of incredibly successful campaigns across all forms of goods, services, and industries. A few are detailed briefly below.

The top Ogilvy Award winner in 2006 was the US Postal Service for its *Access* marketing campaign designed to increase shipping volume and revenue within their online package service. Insightful advertising research revealed that small business owners were under-serviced and resulted in the creation of a new shipping option for this market called Carrier Pick Up. The Access campaign resulted in a 41% return on investment (ROI) between 2005 and 2006.⁷⁴

Apple Incorporated won the 2007 Computer Hardware Grand Effie for its Get a Mac campaign. Macintosh computers (Macs) were viewed as niche computers despite the universal appeal of the iPod, also an Apple Inc. product. New Intel-based Macs introduced in January 2006 offered an opportunity to increase Mac's relevance by showing the simplicity and fun of Mac experience as compared to the frustrations of dealing with personal computers (PCs). The spectacularly successful Get a Mac campaign did just that, resulting in record sales and 42% market share growth.⁷⁵

The 2007 Ogilvy Gold Award winner in the Government, Public Service, and Non-Profit category, You Don't Have To Be Perfect To Be A Perfect Parent, is of

particular interest because of similarities to the Army's strategic communication intent of calling people to action. The Ad Council and the Collaboration to AdoptUsKids, a public-private collaboration of US federal agencies and nonprofit organizations, sponsored this campaign to re-brand the issue of adoption and encourage more prospective parents to inquire about adoption. Extensive research led to a singular, unexpected consumer insight that drove the entire campaign — prospective parents' doubts about their own readiness to adopt and fear of failure are the main barriers to action. The resulting 2006 campaign, which targeted changing prospective parents' mindsets rather than the needs of children, was phenomenally successful. It resulted in a 40% increase in web visitor page views, a whopping 230% increase in calls to the toll-free contact number, and an estimated \$118M in free media by the summer of 2007.⁷⁶

The US Army has also been recognized for marketing success in the past, winning a 2001 Silver Anvil Award for its Birth of an Army, Birth of Freedom: the US Army 225th Birthday Campaign. The results of this effort were unprecedented. More than 73 million people watched, listened, or read about the Army 225th birthday compared to two million people for the previous five birthdays combined. Toll-free calls increased 56% over the previous Army birthday and 70% over the same week the prior year, and Web site visits were up 547% compared to the same week the prior year (2000) and an unbelievable 964% from 1999. Web visits to the Center for Army History were also up 50% over the prior year, as were member of Congress visits to the Army's Congressional Cake Cutting Celebration from two in 1999 to 60 in 2000. This marketing campaign was a resounding success at the relatively nominal cost of \$370,000.^{77,78}

The Army also won a Gold Effie in 2002 in the Government, Institutional, & Recruiting category for its Be All You Can Be campaign. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has won numerous Effie award recognitions for their recruiting efforts: Bronze in 1996, 2002, 2006, and 2007; Silver in 2004; and Gold in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, and 2001.⁷⁹

A number of common success elements can be distilled from award winning campaigns.⁸⁰⁻⁸³ Among them are the following:

- Clearly defined problem statement.

- Specific marketing objective(s).
- Comprehensive exploratory research to including some or all of the following:
 - Ethnographic and/or in-home surveys.
 - Qualitative and/or attitudinal studies.
 - Quantitative techniques and/or statistical analysis.
 - Extensive interviews and/or focus groups.
- Campaign strategy
 - Making use of key, new insights deduced via the research.
 - Focused on addressing prospective customer specific concerns.
 - Clearly aligned with corporate strategic pillars.
- Catchy theme and advertising.
- Confirmatory research and a broad media effort that is not limited to but includes some or all of the following:
 - Message testing.
 - Market mix analyses/marketing return on investment (ROI).
 - Regression analysis.
 - Test marketing.
 - Brand equity tracking.
- Dynamic approach that is constantly updated, modified, and improved as required.

Strategic Communication Scorecard

A variety of strategic communication approaches have been presented to this point, with key fundamentals critical to a message's success identified for each. These fundamentals are consolidated, grouped, and distilled into Key Principles in the right-hand column of the Strategic Communication Crosswalk presented below in Table 1. This crosswalk will serve as a scorecard for further investigation of additional industry case studies and Army strategic communication.

Table 1. Strategic Communication Key Principles Crosswalk

Strategic Communication Tenets	Public Affairs / Public Relations	Branding Fundamentals	Branding Best Practices	Industry Case Studies	Key Principles Crosswalk
Vision Statement	Organization's Core Mission	Identify / Establish Brand Positioning	Have a Vision	Clearly Defined Problem Statement	1) Clearly Defined Vision and Mission
Mission Statement			Align Your Brand With Your Business	Specific Marketing Objective	
Organizational Values & Beliefs	Institutional Values Identified	Identify / Establish Brand Values	<p>Create a Company Culture that Protects and Polishes Your Corporate Brand</p> <p>Treasure Your Employees</p>	Corporate Pillars Identified	2) Clearly Articulated Foundation Values
Public Opinion & Past Coverage Research / Target Audience ID & Understanding	Understand Most Effective Previous Outreach Efforts / Techniques		Create an Emotional Bond With Customers	<p>Comprehensive Exploratory Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnographic and/or in-home surveys Qualitative and/or attitudinal studies Quantitative techniques and/or statistical analysis Extensive interviews and/or focus groups 	<p>3) Awareness & Understanding of Relevant History</p> <p>4) Thorough Understanding of Target Audience, Knowing "What" and "Why?"</p>
Message Development / Definition / Work Plan	Dramatic Message / Emotional Tie to Target Audience / Stress Public Significance	Plan and Implement Brand Marketing Programs	Communicate Your Corporate Brand 360 Degrees	<p>Campaign Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Key New Insights Addresses Prospective Customer Specific Concerns Clearly Aligned w/Corporate Pillars 	5) Key Insight(s) That Drives Approach Used
	Stakeholders / Interests Identified	Internal Branding	Live the Brand		
	Catchy Slogans / Symbols / Clichés / Word Pictures / Related to Higher Attention Value Current Events	Memorable, Meaningful, Likable Messaging	Be Bold Be Consistent	Catchy Theme & Advertising	7) Memorable, Emotional, Consistent Theme(s)
Feedback Loop		Measure and Interpret Brand Performance		<p>Confirmatory Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Message Testing Market Mix / ROI Analyses Regression Analysis Test Marketing Brand Equity Tracking 	8) Continuing Research With Ongoing Feedback
	Adaptable Message	Adaptable / Flexible Message Over Time	Own Your Industry's Innovations	Dynamic Approach, Constantly Updated, Modified, & Improved as Required	9) Flexible, Dynamic Approach
Materials Needed / Resources Earmarked		Grow and Sustain Brand Equity / Legally Protectable	Build Your Brand on a Budget		10) Long-Term Brand Equity Strategy

INDUSTRY CASE STUDIES

A series of case studies are examined below and evaluated using the strategic communication key principles crosswalk shown in Table 1. All are well-known companies and products, but not all of the tales had positive outcomes.

Harley-Davidson's Fall and Rise

William S. Harley and Arthur Davidson established the Harley-Davidson Motor Company in 1903 in a wooden shed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁸⁴ They sold their first motorcycle that year, established their first dealership in Chicago in 1904, and patented their famed bar and shield logo in 1910. From there, Harley-Davidson grew to become a cultural icon and established an important place in American military history along the way. In 1917 and 1918, nearly half of the motorcycles built were sold to the military for use in World War I, totaling almost 20,000 bikes by war's end. Because of this demand, Harley-Davidson became a leader in innovative engineering in the 1920s. In World War II, it produced nearly 90,000 motorcycles for military use, earning it the Army-Navy "E" award for excellence in wartime production.⁸⁵ After the war, Harley began producing recreational bikes, and by 1953 it was the last major motorcycle manufacturer in the US. By the early 1960s, Harley comfortably owned 70 percent of the domestic motorcycle market, but this quickly changed upon Honda's entry to this market.

Unlike Harley and its full-size motorcycle business model, Honda pursued lightweight cycles and advertising directed toward a new customer base. In the words of William H. Davidson, the company president and son of the founder, "Basically, we don't believe in the lightweight market... The lightweight motorcycle is only supplemental."⁸⁶ Within five years, Harley-Davidson's market share had fallen to 5 percent and Honda was firmly entrenched. When Harley finally reacted, it was too little too late. Their lightweight Italian-made motorcycle was inferior in quality and by the late 1960s Honda and other Japanese manufacturers firmly dominated the US motorcycle market.

In 1969, the American Machine and Foundry (AMF) bought out Harley-Davidson, but quality issues continued to plague the company as it ramped up production

to better compete with foreign competition. As one Harley official noted, “quality was going down just as fast as production was going up.”⁸⁷ AMF put Harley-Davidson up for sale in 1981, having endured losses for 11 years averaging \$4.8 million. Thirteen members of the Harley-Davidson management team led by Vaughn Beals, the vice-president of motorcycle sales, purchased the company from AMF in a leveraged buy-out. Harley’s US market share was now 3 percent and continuing to diminish as overall demand for motorcycles also declined, leading to a large inventory of unsold products and layoffs of nearly half of its employees.⁸⁸

In 1983, Congress passed huge tariff increases on large Japanese motorcycles, raising them from 4 percent to almost 50 percent. Tariff protection provided an opportunity for Harley-Davidson to adopt new marketing strategies, manufacturing techniques, and Japanese management principles including the “productivity triad” of just-in-time inventory, statistical operator control, and employee involvement.⁸⁹ Harley-Davidson also restructured its loans to stave off bankruptcy, improved quality, and began the long battle to regain its market share. The turnaround was dramatic. In 1987, one year before the tariffs on Japanese heavyweight motorcycles were scheduled to end, Harley announced it no longer needed special tariffs to compete with the Japanese motorcycle giants.⁹⁰

By Harley-Davidson’s 90th anniversary in 1993, product demand far exceeded production capacity. Strong allegiance to the brand (i.e. brand equity) provided additional benefit to the company through sales of a wide range of licensed Harley clothing and merchandise. The positive trend has continued since then, but not without challenges and the continuing need for innovation. In 2003 for example, Harley-Davidson Motorclothes was recognized with a Bronze Effie for improving consumer perceptions of the apparel brand’s price and quality, as well as addressing core Harley rider concerns that the company was more interested in marketing than building motorcycles. The resulting campaign brought new life to the business and uncovered a fundamental truth about anything that is authentic Harley-Davidson: “It’s all about the ride.”⁹¹

Today, Harley-Davidson is a vibrant, growing company. Harley's 2006 consolidated revenue was \$5.8 billion, an 8.6 percent increase over 2005, and retail results were impressive with dealers selling over 340,000 motorcycles worldwide, more than half of which went to new Harley owners. This healthy position is directly attributable to Harley-Davidson's strong brand, universal appeal, focused product offerings, innovative marketing, and the ability to "get customers in the saddle" and on the road more quickly than ever.⁹²

Through Harley-Davidson's long history, much has gone wrong. Harley-Davidson found itself in a comfortable, complacent position following the war years and into the 1960s as the domestic motorcycle market evolved. Failing to keep pace with changing customer demands and the lack of a clear corporate vision and strategy allowed foreign competition to gain a huge advantage by dominating the lightweight motorcycle market. Increasing production quantity at the expense of quality was a knee-jerk reaction that discouraged all but the most faithful customers and challenged the core strength of the Harley-Davidson — classic, heavyweight motorcycles.

Much has also gone right. As quality improved, Harley-Davidson realized that it could never compete with Japanese motorcycle makers or other challengers on even footing in terms of price. To regain market share, Harley-Davidson established other market values through six major strategies that continue to sustain it today.⁹³

- Define your niche and stick to it. Find niches within the niche. Concentrate on beating your competition there. For Harley-Davidson, this is classic, heavyweight motorcycles.
- Listen to your customers and give them what they want. Create opportunities for customers to tell you what they think about your product or service and take the time to evaluate what they're really saying. Don't change for the sake of change; let the customer define acceptable changes.
- Differentiate your product. Harley sells the entire Harley-Davidson *experience*, not just a motorcycle. To beat your competition, develop products or services with individuality and something unique — whether

it's charisma, quality, delivery, patents, integrity, or some other marketable characteristic.

- Compete on value, not price. Only companies with deep pockets can compete on price. What most companies must strive for today is a competitive edge base on value rather than price. With this edge, even deep-pocketed giants can be beaten.
- Treat dealers as full business partners. A company may make a good product, but the customer's image of the company is usually determined by contact with the company's dealers. For this reason, any marketing strategy must take into account how dealers sell a product.
- Build on your name. Harley-Davidson is a name that can sell all kinds of peripheral products, but management didn't initially recognize this. Now, the Harley-Davidson name and proceeds from selling accessories are carefully controlled through an extensive trademark licensing program, resulting in a wider range of products and designs at lower costs than would be possible using only Harley-Davidson personnel and capital. In today's competitive environment a company must play to its strength and avoid complacency by continually pursuing opportunities in all areas of its business.

These strategies bear great resemblance to the key principles identified in Table 1. Accordingly, its strategic communication scorecard shown in Table 2 is nearly perfect.

Table 2. Harley-Davidson Strategic Communication Scorecard

Strategic Communication Key Principles	Evaluation
1) Clearly defined vision and mission.	Yes
2) Clearly articulated foundation values.	Yes
3) Awareness and understanding of relevant history.	Yes
4) Thorough understanding of target audience, knowing "what" and "why?"	Yes
5) Key insight(s) that drives approach used.	Yes
6) Multi-layered campaign strategy addressing all stakeholders.	Yes
7) Memorable, emotional, consistent theme(s).	Yes
8) Continuing research with ongoing feedback.	Yes
9) Flexible, dynamic approach.	Somewhat (Niche Focused)
10) Long-term brand equity strategy.	Yes
Score	10/10 = 100%

IBM's Resurgence

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) faltered in the early 1990s at the dawn of the Internet Age. In early 1993, it reported a record \$5.46 billion loss for the fourth quarter of 1992 and a deficit for the entire year of \$4.07 billion, at that time the biggest annual loss in American corporate history.⁹⁴ IBM had become a global conglomerate dinosaur that was complacent and content with the reputation and name recognition that had served it so well, for so long.

The root causes of this predicament actually occurred in the 1980s, when IBM chose two fledgling companies as key suppliers for its new personal computer (PC) — Intel for chips and Microsoft for software. Both companies eventually grew to set standards for successive generations of PCs, which would become the domestic computer industries mainstay in lieu of IBM's strength — mainframe computers. As the PC industry blossomed, IBM also began to lose market share in mainframe computer processing and storage systems due to increasing competition. By late 1992, the combined value of Intel and Microsoft stock and exceeded IBM's market value by nearly 50 percent. Factors contributing to IBM's decline included a cumbersome and bureaucratic corporate structure, overly centralized management, and a vulnerable mindset made up of complacency, conservatism, and conceit. The resulting overdependence on high-margin mainframe computers led to neglected software and service and a bloated cost structure as consumer demand for PCs began to skyrocket. By 1997, IBM had little association with the Internet in the minds of customers despite its history as a leader in information technology (IT).⁹⁵

Fortunately, IBM leadership recognized that the company was in a crisis. Through forward-looking critical thinking, the leadership determined that it could still leverage IBM's IT heritage for a yet-to-be-defined category of Internet-enabled business. Research revealed that a new term — “e-business” — was unfamiliar yet inherently intuitive, and that IBM's emotional brand imagery — reliable, trusted, and high quality — gave IBM immeasurable credibility. The resulting *e-Business* campaign produced a rapid and dramatic turnaround that garnered Ogilvy award recognition in 2000 and 2001, and a 2002 Grand Effie award for the best overall advertising campaign in market

performance.⁹⁶ The best feedback of all is that the marketplace recognized and adopted the term e-business, in essence providing IBM with free advertising every time the phrase is used.

Through their e-Business campaign, IBM established itself as the leader of e-business solutions by five times more than the nearest competitor between late 1997 and 1999, and increased its brand value over 1,000 times from \$50 million to \$51.2 billion between 1993 and 2002.⁹⁷ IBM largely credits its success to the insights driven by research, which uncovered that technology decisions were no longer handled strictly by IT personnel, but rather cross-functional committees comprised of IT and non-IT management. IBM has already exceeded its revenue goals by nearly four times, creating \$152 million in new business opportunities.⁹⁸

In the aggregate, what went wrong? IBM's arrogance and complacency brought it to the edge of a corporate precipice, as practices and principles that had worked so well for so long could not sustain it through the revolutionary changes brought to the IT industry by the Internet era. Fortunately though, much more again went right. IBM management recognized that dramatic change was required while there was yet time to react, comprehensive research identified a new business niche, and a dynamic, flexible marketing approach built upon IBM's reputation, established them as an e-business leader, and developed long-term brand equity. IBM's strategic communication scorecard shown in Table 3 reflects these successes.

Table 3. IBM Strategic Communication Scorecard

Strategic Communication Key Principles	IBM
1) Clearly defined vision and mission.	Yes
2) Clearly articulated foundation values.	Yes
3) Awareness and understanding of relevant history.	Yes
4) Thorough understanding of target audience, knowing "what" and "why?"	Yes
5) Key insight(s) that drives approach used.	Yes
6) Multi-layered campaign strategy addressing all stakeholders.	Yes
7) Memorable, emotional, consistent theme(s).	Yes
8) Continuing research with ongoing feedback.	Yes
9) Flexible, dynamic approach.	Yes
10) Long-term brand equity strategy.	Yes
Score	10/10 = 100%

The New Coke Saga

On April 23, 1985, “the best was made better” in the words of Roberto C. Goizueta, the chairman of Coca-Cola, as the 99 year-old original Coke formula was abandoned in favor of a new, sweeter variation dubbed New Coke.⁹⁹ However, despite the two years of research and nearly \$4 million invested in this decision, public pressure forced the Coca-Cola company to reverse course and bring back “Coca-Cola Classic” less than three months later. Why?

The search for a better Coke arose from a declining market share to Pepsi-Cola through the late 1970s and early 1980s, and was spurred on by the Pepsi Generation and Pepsi Challenge campaigns. The latter was a series of blind taste tests that showed a clear consumer preference for Pepsi over Coke. The Coca-Cola Company’s own testing confirmed these findings.¹⁰⁰ By 1984, Coke had barely a three percent market share advantage over Pepsi, even while outspending them in advertising by \$100 million and having twice as many vending machines, greater shelf space in stores, and competitive pricing. Consequently, the company began to look at Coke itself as the source of the problems. Research suggested that taste was the single most important cause of Coke’s decline, which led to Project Kansas, a program to replace the original secret formula.¹⁰¹

Some 2,000 interviews in ten major markets were conducted under Project Kansas to assess consumers’ reactions to test formulations for changing Coke. The results were mixed, but work on the new formulation continued. By September 1984, a new, sweeter Coke formula was introduced in blind taste tests. This new flavor beat Pepsi, whereas Pepsi had always beaten Coke in previous testing. Researchers estimated that the new flavor would boost Coke’s market share by one percentage point and \$200 million in sales. Even so, Coke spent almost \$4 million more in the largest taste test ever. Fifty-five percent of the 191,000 people in 13 cities exposed to various unmarked formulations favored New Coke over the original formula and over Pepsi as well. Armed with this information and partly under pressure from bottlers who didn’t want an additional product to worry about, company executives unanimously decided to replace, rather than supplement, the original Coke formulation with New Coke.¹⁰²

In January 1985, the McCann-Erickson advertising agency, holder of the current US Army advertising contract,¹⁰³ was given the task of marketing New Coke to the public. On April 25, 1985, Coke executives held a press conference at Lincoln Center in New York to introduce New Coke. The event was well attended, and within 24 hours 81 percent of the US population knew about the change. One-hundred and fifty million people even tried New Coke, which was the most ever for a new product. Apparently though, many reporters who had attended the news conference didn't buy into the need for New Coke, and neither did consumers. Within weeks the initially positive consumer feedback had transformed into a torrent of negative sentiment fueled by the media. By July, only 30 percent of consumers said that they liked New Coke. Finally, On July 11, 1985, company executives announced the decision to bring back Coke Classic, admitting that they had not understood "the deep emotions" of so many Coca-Cola customers.¹⁰⁴ In spite of the fiasco, New Coke generated an incredible amount of free publicity and greatly raised consumer awareness about Coke, which some contended was the company's plan all along.

With the benefit of perfect hindsight, what went right? The process leading to the development of New Coke was deliberate, backed by research, and had the direct involvement of senior management. The decision to switch to New Coke was neither taken lightly nor made in a vacuum, and the problem statement was clear — increase market share over Pepsi.

There was much more that went wrong, however. Most significant was that the company didn't grasp the factors involved in consumers' decisions to choose Coke or Pepsi until after New Coke had failed. An indication of this is the \$100 million advertising advantage Coke had over Pepsi prior to New Coke that didn't produce a commensurate return on investment, meaning that the advertising didn't motivate consumers' decision to choose Coke over Pepsi. Neither did the research conducted in support of New Coke identify or address the key consumer issue — *why?* Why do people drink Coke? Why do they prefer Coke over Pepsi or vice versa? Why (or why not) would someone *want* a new Coke flavor? Company executives, not market research, determined the need for New Coke in response to flagging sales and that New Coke

would replace, rather than supplement, the original variety; consumers were never convinced of the need for New Coke. Accordingly, the market research conducted was based upon flawed assumptions and was only useful in determining the best way to execute a poor management decision. Exacerbating the research problem was that less than a quarter of the almost 200,000 taste tests conducted included the final New Coke formulation. The rest involved sweeter flavors, which tended to bias blind taste tests. Most significant was that the research did not capture consumer opinions about the symbolic value of Coke, even though this was the true brand strength of the company.¹⁰⁵ The lesson here is that while research is important, incomplete research can lead to flawed decision-making. New Coke’s strategic communications scorecard shown in Table 4 highlights these shortcomings.

Table 4. New Coke Strategic Communication Scorecard

Strategic Communication Key Principles	New Coke
1) Clearly defined vision and mission.	Yes
2) Clearly articulated foundation values.	No
3) Awareness and understanding of relevant history.	No
4) Thorough understanding of target audience, knowing “what” and “why?”	No
5) Key insight(s) that drives approach used.	No
6) Multi-layered campaign strategy addressing all stakeholders.	No
7) Memorable, emotional, consistent theme(s).	Somewhat (The Best Just Got Better?)
8) Continuing research with ongoing feedback.	Yes
9) Flexible, dynamic approach.	No
10) Long-term brand equity strategy.	No
Score	3/10 = 30%

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding research and case studies reveal a basic truth — strategic communication doesn’t just happen. Successful strategic communication campaigns, whether product or policy focused, are not unlike military operations. They are carefully planned, deliberate efforts that target public consciousness to achieve specific goals. An important distinction, though, is that successful strategic communication requires an emotional tie with the target audience.

Army Strategic Communication Scorecard

The same scorecard methodology used above to evaluate the case studies can be applied to Army Strategic Communication. As described earlier, Army Strategic Communication contains two main thrusts at the margins of the strategic communication spectrum — high-level engagements undertaken by senior leaders, and recruiting efforts focused upon the enlistment eligible population. There is little in between that is directed external to the Army, and there is limited opportunity for other stakeholder involvement due to an absence of awareness and resources. The Army’s strategic communication assessment, shown in Table 5, reflects these shortcomings.

Table 5. Army Strategic Communication Scorecard

Strategic Communication Key Principles	Army Strategic Communication
1) Clearly Defined Vision and Mission	Yes
2) Clearly Articulated Foundation Values	Yes
3) Awareness and Understanding of Relevant History	Somewhat (e.g., Army Birthday Campaign)
4) Thorough Understanding of Target Audience, Knowing “What” and “Why?”	Somewhat (Propensity to Serve, Segmentation Studies)
5) Key Insight(s) That Drives Approach Used	Not Evident
6) Multi-Layered Campaign Strategy Addressing All Stakeholders	Only at the Margins (i.e. No)
7) Memorable, Emotional, Consistent Theme(s)	Somewhat (Army Strong, America’s Army: The Strength of the Nation)
8) Continuing Research With Ongoing Feedback	Yes
9) Flexible, Dynamic Approach	Not Evident
10) Long-Term Brand Equity Strategy	Somewhat (SCCG, USAAC, USAREC)
Score	7/10 = 70%

There is no question that the Army's purpose as reflected in (rather lengthy) vision and mission statements, are well established. From the 2007 Army Posture Statement:¹⁰⁶

The Army Vision: Relevant and Ready Landpower In Service To The Nation

The challenges posed by the 21st Century security environment drive our vision of the force we must become to continue to accomplish our mission, to preserve peace and freedom for the Nation. Maintaining our focus on Soldiers — who are well led and organized into flexible, adaptive formations in our Operating Force, and properly supported by our Generating Force — we will ensure that our Army continues to be relevant, in terms of its design, and ready, in terms of its capabilities, for whatever the Nation demands. America has entrusted us to preserve peace, maintain freedom, and defend democracy — a role we have performed for over 230 years. Today, because of our Soldiers and our record of accomplishment, the American people regard the Army as one of the Nation's most respected institutions. We will maintain this trust.

Mission: Providing Forces and Capabilities

The Army exists to serve the American people, to defend the Nation, to protect vital national interests, and to fulfill national military responsibilities. Our mission is enduring: to provide necessary forces and capabilities to the Combatant Commanders in support of the *National Security and Defense Strategies*. The Army recruits, organizes, trains, and equips Soldiers who, as vital members of their units and the Joint Team, conduct prompt, sustained combat and stability operations on land. The Army is also charged with providing logistics and support to enable the other Services to accomplish their missions, and supporting civil authorities in time of emergency, when directed.

The Army's foundation values (Army Values), shown below, are also clearly established: loyalty; duty; respect; selfless service; honor; integrity, and personal courage.¹⁰⁷ Further,

...our Army Ethic rests on a bedrock of our seven Army Values; Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. It is a unique collection, unlike any other organization's in the world, and reflects the high standards to which the entire Army adheres, regardless of its mission area.¹⁰⁸

However, Army Values are neither prominent on the public US Army website (www.us.army.mil) nor featured in the overall strategic communication effort. Army values do not appear to be an integral part of the current Army Strong recruiting campaign.

The Army is well aware of its history and relevance to the nation. Using these themes as strategic communication focal points has proven extremely successful in the past, as evidenced by the 2001 Silver Anvil award-winning 225th Birthday Campaign discussed previously. This outreach had a significant positive impact on the two thrusts that dominate current strategic communication efforts. It is not apparent, though, that current strategic communication efforts, particularly recruiting outreach, have continued to capitalize on the themes of Army history and relevance to the nation. The Army Strong recruiting theme seems appealing enough, at least to those in uniform. Whether or not it appeals to those *not* in uniform, or whether the *America's Army: The Strength of the Nation* theme has any consumer awareness or resonance are different questions.

There is ample data that detail youth propensity to serve in the military and further Army-specific analysis that segments and analyzes the recruitment-eligible youth population. This current research effort has shown, though, that successful branding, marketing, and strategic communication all require a deeper consumer understanding than demographics alone. Particularly in regards to recruiting, rather than focusing on how people feel, the questions should be why and what? Why is youth propensity to serve in the military diminishing? Why are they or their influencers motivated toward, or discouraged from, military service? What truly drives the emotions behind the attitudes, and are there key insights missing from the recruiting incentive mix? Maybe the incentives aren't adequate. Maybe the focus is wrong. Maybe they're even too much in some areas. Does the Army Strong theme even appeal to today's youth, or their influencers? Why or why not? If not, what theme(s) does capture their attention? Do the incentives being offered truly appeal to prospective recruits, and if not, what would? The present approach seems reminiscent of New Coke in that a well envisioned plan of action being vigorously executed, but it may not be a well-founded plan. Additionally, prior research has shown that audiences and their astuteness vary greatly among matters of even great interest in the public debate. It may be concluded from this that a "one size fits all" message only fits the size of the audience with which it resonates. If the Army desires to appeal to potential recruits and influence the influencers, it likely needs specific messages targeting those specific populations.

Recommendations for Change

Detailed below are a number of specific recommendations to address perceived shortcomings in the current Army strategic communication approach.

Strategic Communication

- To help the Army do a better job of advocating on its own behalf, *develop a synchronized communication plan that identifies specific roles and responsibilities from the strategic level to the tactical level.* Just as soldiers wouldn't take the hill without a battle plan, strategic leaders need a plan that focuses specific messages toward specific audiences (cultural elites, those who are rationally ignorant, etc.) to achieve desired results. The communications battle space will be filled whether or not the Army is present, so the Army, to include soldiers, family members, and other associated with the Army, needs to be fully engaged, but in a meaningful way that maximizes opportunity and benefit. Well-intended but random efforts will not be effective, and a focus only at margins overlooks a significant portion of the American public. Deliberate efforts are required at all levels to have a hope of shaping public opinion. For example, what constitutes elite cultural influencers, who will talk to them when and how, and what are the messages? What would Army leaders like soldiers to share with friends, family, and their influencers when they see them? How should the messages evolve to keep pace with current events and Army needs? The goal here is coordinated, synchronized, deliberate efforts spanning the full spectrum of public awareness.
- *Increase formal training for soldiers, which is admittedly inadequate.*¹⁰⁹ Every public figure that conducts interviews on a regular basis, and by analogy, speaks in public forums, needs media training.¹¹⁰ Having served almost 23 years in the Army, I can recall only three hours of formal media-related training, and that was 10 years ago and didn't actually involve any media interaction. Soldiers at all levels need sharpening to know how to make the most of their opportunities if they are to be

effective communicators of Army themes, goals, or even their own experiences. Just as the modern battlefield has no front lines, neither does the public debate or the opportunity to shape it. All in the Army have the potential to shape public opinion at some point in their careers, even if only in the context of one-on-one discussions with family, friends, or neighbors, so all would benefit from exposure to tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP's) on speaking to the public, dealing with the media, and educating individuals about the Army. For example, don't ever say, "no comment" to answer a question. Why? Because it implies guilt or a cover-up.¹¹¹ Other critical information requirements include: the Army's strategic themes and where are they found; how to prepare for interviews or speaking opportunities; how to "stay in your lane" (by prefacing comments with statements such as "I don't speak for the Army, but I think . . ." or "what I know as a platoon sergeant is . . ." ¹¹²); how to respond to negative or "ambush" questions; and PR mistakes to be avoided during a crisis. These and other relatively simple communication concepts need to be at the ready for soldiers at all levels.

- *Reward soldiers for public engagement.* Create an incentive program, similar to the in-service recruiter bonuses, that encourages soldiers to speak to schools, civic groups, and so on. For example, offer free trips home and/or extended R&R leave when done in conjunction with speaking at local high schools.
- *Require uniforms to be worn during all CONUS, duty-related travel* unless there are mitigating circumstances (classified mission, en route from OCONUS, etc.) Because certain components of the Army travel extensively in the course of their normal duties (the Acquisition Corps, for example), there is tremendous free publicity potential waiting to be taken advantage of. Along with that, consider relaxing the prohibiting on riding in first class while in uniform. That may be where the elite cultural influencers are sitting.

- *Create opportunities to educate the public at large* about the Army, not just potential recruits. The Air Force has incentive rides and the Navy has friends and family day cruises. The Army has no comparable opportunity to expose friends, family or interested citizens to life in the Army. Why not have family day/overnight visit during Basic Training, or post open-houses where anyone can ride in an Army vehicle? Give truck rides at the local recruiting station or high school. Seeing static displays is one thing, but getting to experience something uniquely Army is totally different.

Recruiting

- *Constantly revise recruiting efforts based upon ongoing, in-depth research to keep pace with current events and public opinion.* Army Strong may have had a strong initial impact, as did Be All You Can Be before it, but it may be time for a new or revised theme. Two suggestions are *Army Strong*, *America Strong* and *America's Army: Strength of the Nation*.
- A preponderance of data shows that the most effective public opinion shaping campaigns achieve success through multi-modal research leading to key insights followed by agile, dynamic campaigns. In Bank of America's 2007 Ogilvy Award-winning debit card campaign for example, the key insight uncovered during one-on-one research interviews was a woman who always rounded her checkbook transactions to the nearest dollar. Bank executives were intrigued by this and thought the same principle could be applied to debit cards. The result was the *Keep the Change*, a debit card based savings service launched in 2006 that automatically deposits the difference between checking based debit card purchases and the next whole dollar amount to into customers' savings account. Keep the Change resulted in a 10 percent savings account acquisitions growth compared to the prior year, a five percent increase in parallel checking account growth, and nearly 13 percent growth in debt transactions — all because of an idea discovered during research

interviews.¹¹³ Now may be the time to redirect recruiting efforts based upon more current, detailed research and new, key insights.

- *Capitalize on Army Values as an underlying recruiting theme.* Tying strategic communication efforts to foundation corporate values is an industry best practice. Army Strong does not do this.
- *Ensure recruiting efforts live the brand,* another industry best practice. The USMC's Effie award-winning efforts seem to do this well by challenging youth with whether or not they have what it takes to become a Marine. Abercrombie & Fitch, for example, draws the majority of its attractive, student-age sales force (brand representatives) from college campuses near each store location, focusing on the visual appeal of the sales staff. This is critical to create an in-store environment that reflects the lifestyle of its core customer base. As one company representative stated:

We're not interested in salespeople or clerks. We're interested in finding people who represent the brand's lifestyle, which is the college lifestyle — leaders who have charisma, who portray the image of the brand.¹¹⁴

- *Capitalize on the high regard that military officers hold in our society.* According to the latest Harris Poll, 52 percent of Americans view being a military officer as one of the most “most prestigious occupations,” behind only firefighters (61 percent), scientists (54 percent), and teachers (54 percent), and equal with doctors (52 percent). The percentage of people sharing this viewpoint has *steadily increased* from 46 percent in 2003, despite the war on terror.¹¹⁵ An opportunity to serve under the best leadership the nation has should be worth a lot to influencers and prospective recruits. Further, if a diminishing propensity of youth to serve is truly a function of feelings toward the war on terror, the fact that military officers are increasingly held in high esteem shows that the public is still able to disassociate politics from the value of military service.

- *Consider using recognized spokespeople to advertise and advocate for the Army, possibly a known personality who has previously served in the military, to create secondary brand associations. This is a common industry practice.*
- *Encourage Congress to actively and vocally support recruiting efforts.* The Constitution vested Congress, not the Army, with the authority to “raise and support armies.”¹¹⁶ Serving in the military is a form of public service, and recruiting is a national challenge, not the services’ alone. Just as elected officials have aspired to public service, they should inspire others to do the same, whether in uniform or by some other means.

Branding and Marketing

- *Clarify and strengthen the Army Brand.* Most people, to include soldiers, probably don’t even know that there is an Army Brand. What’s more is that brand marks, shown below, are confusing.¹¹⁷ Is the brand symbol the US Army symbol with the star logo? Or is it the words “Call to Duty: Boots on the Ground”? Or is it Army Strong? Or is it all three together? If we in the Army aren’t sure, certainly the rest of the public is probably confused as well. Whatever it is, it may not be having the desired effect on consumer impressions and Army brand equity. A clarification of the desired communications objectives of the Army brand marks and empirical analysis to fully understand the design characteristics of the Army brand marks and their ability to achieve desired communication objectives may be in order.¹¹⁸



Figure 1: Army Brand Marks

- *Make Army gear available through retail sales.* You don’t need to own a Harley to own Harley paraphernalia. Why can’t the same be true for the

Army? Presently, the only folks that get to wear authentic, licensed Army gear either have some direct connection to the Army or bought it from a surplus store, unless they happen to be NASCAR fans. Why not have online or retail opportunities for folks to buy licensed Army gear? Tee-shirts, jackets, hats, pajamas, whatever. Being associated with the military is a very “cool” thing — consider the many youth that wear camouflage pattern clothing. Why not capitalize on that, the same way Harley Davidson has through their retail stores? This is an opportunity to feed the desire to be affiliated with the Army, especially for those who aren’t already.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research effort was to explore Army efforts to shape public opinion via strategic communication and contrast them with efforts by industry to do the same. The goal was to identify common themes and determine if they are present in the Army's approach. To develop a strategic communication foundation, the paper first defined the term and identified key tenets, then considered factors involved in shaping public opinion to include the environment, the science of public opinion, how public opinion is molded through strategic message campaigns, and Army strategic communication. Next, a contrasting position was developed by presenting an industry perspective of strategic brand management. Strategic brand management and branding were defined, some branding fundamentals and best practices were presented, and characteristics from a number of highly successful advertising campaigns were identified. These characteristics along with the branding fundamentals and best practices, public relations fundamentals, and strategic communications tenets were then compared with each other to identify common themes and develop a key principles crosswalk. This crosswalk was used as a scorecard to evaluate additional industry case studies and Army strategic communication.

A number of Army strategic communication omissions were identified using the key principles crosswalk and lessons from industry's example. Most glaring is that current Army strategic communication efforts are neither comprehensive enough nor synchronized well enough to span the full spectrum of public awareness. The paper concludes strategic communication recommendations for senior Army leadership to consider.

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