



PR STAR



Mike Schwager: PR Solo Practitioner

[By Heather Jung]

A number of years ago, Mike Schwager was working as a writer for CBS Audience Services in New York City. His primary job function was to read and respond to letters from viewers regarding stories aired on the network's news shows. One day, he came across a letter addressed to morning news anchor Hughes Rudd. The letter, written by Michael Klepper (then a member of Burson-Marsteller), was a pitch letter suggesting a guest for Rudd's show.

"[It] was one of the most ingenious letters and well-crafted letters I had ever read in my purview as a writer for CBS Audience Services," Schwager said. "I was intrigued."

Schwager said that, at this point in his career, he was ready for a change, so he decided to try his hand at public relations. Schwager contacted Klepper and expressed interest in working with him at Burson-Marsteller. After interviews with both Klepper and vice president Buck Buchwald, Schwager was offered a job at the world-renowned agency as a broadcast media specialist.

A few years later, Klepper left Burson-Marsteller to start his own agency and asked Schwager to be president, a position Schwager gladly accepted. Then, in 1985, Schwager created his own media relations agency, the Media Relations Group, which he managed for 10 years before selling the agency and deciding to work as a solo practitioner.

As a solo practitioner, Schwager performs a number of jobs for his clients. He does media interviews and crisis training sessions. He works as a publicist for numerous organizations and individuals and serves as a consultant to CEOs who need an "outside-the-box" view of their marketing strategies. He does work for humanitarian and nonprofit organizations that want their names out in the media and is hired by companies interested in cause-related marketing.

In his 12 years as a solo practitioner, Schwager has amassed an impressive list of clients, including CURE International, Geneva Global, World Vision, KidsPeace, IBM, and the National Spinal Cord Injury Association. He is also currently doing publicity work

for the book *A Billion Bootstraps*, which examines the necessity of microcredits in third world countries.

There are several campaigns Schwager has worked on in his career that he is extremely proud of. The first is the Exhibition of the People's Republic of China, which was China's first trade and cultural exhibition in the United States, which he worked on during his tenure at Klepper's agency. The exhibition went from San Francisco to Chicago to New York. As the director of PR, Schwager garnered publicity for the exhibition in every single media outlet in those cities, as well as just about every outlet throughout the country.

"I think that some of the work that I have been most proud of in the last several years [has] been helping humanitarian organizations break through to the media, getting media coverage," he said.

In that regard, there are two organizations that come to Schwager's mind: Opportunity International and CURE International. In 1998, he was approached by Opportunity International, an organization that, despite its 29-year existence, had not received an iota of publicity. Schwager went to work and got the nonprofit company a number of placements, including numerous op-ed pieces. For CURE International, he has also done a number of campaigns, including a 2003 campaign for the organization's Baby Rebecca project. Baby Rebecca was born in the Dominican Republic with an unusual

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. I am a long-distance runner, and I've done that ever since I ran in the New York marathon. I also love to go to movies; I am a real movie buff. I love to not just find a great new movie but to look at the old movies that you can only find in video or maybe Turner. Movies and plays. I am also a creative writer, and I am working on several plays right now. And last but not least, I am a great lover of animals. I really love animals. I am involved in volunteer animal advocacy projects.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. My author. A CD by Knight Kiplinger of Kiplinger Newsletters. Kiplinger wrote a financial summary and recorded a CD on *A Billion Bootstraps*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *TIME* magazine.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I think it's still *60 Minutes*.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. It's my father. My father is a Holocaust survivor who lost most of his family during World War II during the Nazi era. Growing up, I knew him as a very loving man who forgave the Germans and who really was very kind. He's my primary role model. His first name was Owen.



PR STAR

defect: two heads. CURE brought a team from California to work with CURE surgeons to remove the extra head. Rebecca ultimately passed away, but Schwager's work generated worldwide publicity and brought in millions of dollars in donations to CURE.

According to Schwager, there are both "pluses and minuses to the advent of new technologies," particularly the Internet.

"The biggest minus I can see in the advent of new technologies is that often the art of telling a story has been lost. The art of writing has been lost—if not lost, has been diminished. And journalists are still looking for the story; the story is still the key, irrespective of the medium through which it is told. I think that so much attention to high-tech has somehow diminished the talent of telling the story, and I think that we have to keep our eyes on the prize," said Schwager.

And while he does see the benefit of email, he always tries to make a phone connection first. He said there is nothing like "establishing a voice presence" and being able to demonstrate your ability to share the essence of a story with someone. He does, however, feel that email is a much more effective tool than voicemail.

"What is critical is what is in that subject line and in the first two or three lines of the email letter because, and this is another problem, often publicists today don't know how to crystallize a story, and they don't empathize with the journalist's situation that he or she is beseeched by deadlines, by assignments and tasks by their own editors, and are inundated with PR messages. So it is critical, in order to gain the respect of a journalist, but also to get his or her attention, to know how to crystallize a story," said Schwager. Schwager said that the most valuable asset

to people in PR is the ability to communicate well, both in writing and orally. While he said that it is ideal to be able to both write and pitch well, he advised those interested in PR to make sure they have talent in at least one of those areas.

ON THE NET

Mike Schwager's site
www.mediamavens.com/Index.htm

Opportunity International
www.opportunity.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=193&srcid=-2

CURE International
www.curenetcomm.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?&pid=183&srcid=-2

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.