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You Can't Spin Mother Nature

By James Hoggan

The PR profession has a crushing public relations problem. We have a serious credibility issue on the number one issue of the day and that lack of credibility is undermining our ability to serve our clients and our employers.

The issue is the environment, which Angus Reid Strategies reported this year has been Canadians' principal concern since 2005, outstripping the economy and health care.

And among environmental issues, climate change is tops: 77% of Canadians say they believe the climate is changing and that human activity is making it worse.

When it comes to climate change credibility, 77% of Canadians also said they believe scientists and 62% believe environmental organizations.

But what about the people who usually pay for PR advice? Government? Only 23% of respondents said they believe what the feds say about climate change. Corporations – 11%; industry associations – 9%. Our usual clients have almost no credibility on Canada's top issue.

Startled by this information, I asked Angus Reid to research the PR industry's credibility. In an omnibus survey in May, we asked: "Which of the following statements best represents your own opinion of the role and function performed by public relations experts?"

- "PR experts help the public better understand the environmental performance of companies by providing clear and accurate information."
- "PR experts help deceive the public by making the environmental performance of companies appear better than it really is."

Here's the horrifying result: 81% of respondents said they thought we help our clients misrepresent their performance.

Maybe we have to blame ourselves – or at least those of our colleagues who have spun issues in the past.

Think of innovators like Edward Bernays, the so-called "father of public relations." Bernays came up with some harmless – and timeless – stunts: he conceived the first known political pancake breakfast. But he also organized the Torches of Liberty parade in 1929, assembling a crowd of young women to march through Manhattan smoking Lucky Strikes.

Bernays sold it as a women's rights event, but the American Tobacco Company paid the bill – reaping the benefit when women felt "liberated" enough to smoke in public.

"If we hope to recover our reputation, public relations professionals need to distance ourselves from questionable PR practices and speak out against unethical tactics. We need to encourage our clients to act decisively and honourably."



Big tobacco wrote the book on manipulative PR, giving cigarettes to soldiers, paying stars to smoke on screen, and always denying the link between smoking and cancer. But in 1993, tobacco giant Philip Morris crossed a toxic line.

By then, people had stopped believing tobacco company "science." So Philip Morris' PR advisor suggested the creation of a group of "independent" scientists who would speak on the company's behalf. This "grassroots organization," The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC), would establish itself as an arm's-length information source for media and, according to a strategy document now on the public record, "encourage the public to question - from the grassroots up - the validity of scientific studies."

Seeking a broader base, TASSC also sent recruitment letters to 20,000 businesses inviting them to join this fight for "sound science." TASSC then reframed legitimate public health questions - from DDT to climate change - as debatable issues of "junk science" and free choice.

TASSC used four public relations tactics that I think we should avoid:

- 1. Ventriloquism** – Pay someone else to say something that wouldn't be credible if you said it yourself. ExxonMobil can't credibly deny climate science, so the company has funneled \$23 million to "independent" think tanks that do no scientific research, but constantly question the legitimacy of climate scientists.
- 2. Truthiness** – Coined by comedian Stephen Colbert, Truthiness describes things that sound true intuitively, things you feel are true even without supporting evidence. George Orwell called it "bellyfeel." Self-styled climate change expert, Tim Ball, often says: "Environment Canada can't tell you what the weather's going to be like next week; why would we believe them when they try to tell us what's going to happen in 50 years?" This is silly: it confuses weather with climate. But it still has a ring of truthiness.
- 3. Astroturfing** – This is the setting up of fake grassroots organizations like TASSC. Echo Chamber describes a coalition of information sources that repeat dubious messages so often that they start to ring true. You recruit think tanks or friendly reporters to generate stories; then count on ideological blogs and networks (like Fox) to spread the word.
- 4. Media Manipulation** – Mainstream media can also be manipulated. Reporters who are too busy to master every contentious issue often try to cover themselves by quoting "experts" on both sides. But Naomi Oreskes, Professor of History and Scientific Studies at U.C. San Diego, proved that this isn't "balance." Oreskes randomly selected abstracts for 928 climate change-related journal articles between 1993 and 2003 and found not a single peer-reviewed paper challenged the consensus that human activity is causing climate change.

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If Perception is Reality Then We Need to get some PR Help for PR

By Lawrence Stevenson, APR



Toronto has recently survived another highly successful Toronto International Film Festival, where our city is bombarded with celebrities, paparazzi, sightseers, film buffs and movers and shakers from the entertainment and fashion industries. This world-class event is a huge boon to not only the Toronto economy, but to the Canadian and international film production industries. I bring this up because it is my impression that during this 10-day festival, Torontonians may be exposed to the terms *PR*, *public relations*, and *publicity* more often than at any other time of the year.

However, does the general public really know what it is that you and I, as public relations professionals, do on a day-to-day basis?

For that matter, is what I do the same as the rest of my colleagues in the public relations world?

The answer is undoubtedly a resounding 'NO'.

The practice of public relations encompasses a universe of potential interactions including but not limited to media relations, government relations, investor relations, community relations, and yes, even publicity.

There are many definitions of public relations, but the theory is universal – effective public relations is a strategic management function that engages publics with an organization in a two-way dialogue that is mutually beneficial.

This issue of our newsletter serves as an excellent example of a cross-section of public relations in Canada. James Hoggan's excellent article "*You Can't Spin Mother Nature: Understanding the Climate Debate*" is a thought-provoking exploration of our industry's role in the environmental debate. I had the honour of hearing James speak on this subject at the CPRS National Conference in Edmonton and his insightful comments opened my eyes to a new way of looking at and thinking about the footprint we leave on the earth. I'm sure that you will find his article as compelling as I did.

As well, Jeff Roach, APR provides us with an in-depth look at reputation management. He maintains it's no longer a second-tier consideration in an organization's strategic management process and that an organization's reputation is valuable enough to be treated as a strategic asset and managed accordingly by communicators.

This issue of *New Perspectives* highlights the divide between the public's perception of our industry and the actual services we provide to our clients, corporations, or organizations.

I challenge each of you to make it a part of your professional development goals to help eradicate this divide and to help educate the broader public on the strategic and management counsel that is the integral function of public relations.



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Ethical Blogging

Openness and transparency vital for PR practitioners

By Parker Mason



Grassroots movements led by concerned citizens have enormous potential to spread awareness and initiate change. The rise of social media has provided grassroots organizations – once common to rallies and public meetings – with a powerful online podium.

The New York Times recently reported that Facebook groups and blogs have become effective action points for marketing a worthy cause.

Their success has not gone unnoticed. Their techniques have been adopted by less noble marketers whose false grassroots initiatives have been dubbed ‘astroturfing’ by the online community. From a distance the real and the fake can be indistinguishable and this devious lack of transparency is distasteful to the blogging community whose very tenet is one of full disclosure.

Blogger and PR practitioner Paul Young started a backlash movement among bloggers that features ‘Anti-Astroturfing’ buttons on their blog sites. Says Young: “Astroturfing is the practice of creating fake entities that appear to be real grassroots organizations, when in fact they are the work of people or groups with hidden motives and identities. It is a deceptive and deceitful practice – and while it is often blamed on public relations, it is really only carried out by unethical individuals who lack the savvy and intelligence to persuade people with an honest argument.”

A recent example of this is when Time Warner began advertising for the DVD release of the Superman Returns movie. A channel was created on YouTube to promote the movie, and thousands of people subscribed to it. In fact, for a week it was the number one most subscribed-to channel. However, someone quickly noted that all of the accounts subscribing to the Superman Returns channel had been created just the week before. None of them had pictures in their profiles. None of them subscribed to anything else. What is worse, it appears that very few of these “subscribers” even bothered to watch the Superman Returns clips on YouTube.

The same Web 2.0 tools that enable easier communication also allow for a degree of anonymity favorable to the astroturfer. Blogs and e-mail accounts can be set up anonymously in minutes. It’s the same for social networking, video-sharing and photo website accounts.

Another practice being debated by bloggers as questionably ethical is the phenomenon of “ghost-blogging.” Identical to the practice of ghostwriting in the literary world, an undisclosed person writes and posts to a blog on behalf of someone else.

Some bloggers, such as Mitch Joel, named one of the most influential Blog Marketers of 2006, doesn’t think it is a big deal. He compares ghostblogging to a speech or quote written by a communications professional for their CEO. “I just don’t get the difference,” he writes on his blog at www.twistimage.com.

Forgetablogit, a service launched in March of this year, takes a firm stand in favour. “Forgetablogit.com offers blogs to the blogless,” their press release says. “We are a full service, Blogging, PR and Ghostwriting firm. Our experience crosses over multiple industries, and we are ready to create a stress-free blogging experience for your business.”

In the online discussion that followed the announcement, Maggie Fox of The Social Media Group pointed out on her organization’s blog that this kind of activity is actually illegal in Europe. Fleishman-Hillard’s David Jones referred to the service as a “mind-numbingly bad idea.”

The difference seems to be an unwritten blogger code of ethics that leans toward openness and transparency in a way that PR and marketing professionals may not be accustomed. Efforts on the part of individuals or companies experimenting in the blogosphere are judged heavily on their success in offering full disclosure and fair credit. And they are discovering that the blogosphere can be a cruel environment in which to make a mistake.

Last year a blogger wrote a number of pseudonymous posts highly critical of Michael Ignatieff while buoying up then-leader of the Ontario NDP Bob Rae. However, it was quickly discovered through some high-tech sleuthing that the blogger was working for the offices of a large advertising firm with ties to the Liberal government. The fact that the blogger (who went by the name “Skip”) was so sneaky about it

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The Case for Reputation Management

By Jeff Roach, APR



Reputation management is no longer seen as a second-tier consideration in the organization's strategic management process. It exists to help organizations maintain the societal permission they need to continue operating. This changing view underscores

the rapidly emerging consensus within executive management that the organization's reputation is valuable enough to be treated as a strategic asset and managed accordingly.

Charles J. Fombrun and Cees M. Van Riel are the co-authors of *Fame & Fortune, How Successful Companies Build Winning Reputations*. In the book they make a strong case for treating reputation as a fourth class of corporate asset complementing the traditional capital, human and intellectual asset categories around which most corporate reporting is structured.

The book shows that top-rated companies manage their reputations systematically by building strong and sustainable relationships with their stakeholders through a combination of sustained leadership, internal and external communications, citizenship and workplace initiatives.

Essentially, the two authors lay down the *raison d'être* for the corporate communications function. In the process, they point to some of the basic guidelines we should follow when we develop and execute our programs.

A step in this direction would be to ensure that the programs we design and carry out are informed by the latest and best thinking on reputation management.

It is easier to fulfill this role when we can demonstrate that our programs support the strategic needs of our organizations. This effort becomes easier again when our plans include objectives stating clearly what will be accomplished to meet these needs and tactics showing how effectiveness will be assessed.

Span of responsibility is an important question for professional corporate communicators. Until the late 1980s, most corporate communications functions were responsible for investor relations, government relations, media relations, employee communications, community relations, issues management and corporate contributions.

Today, corporate communications, investor relations and government relations usually occupy their own functional silos. It doesn't take a genius to see the complexity that this separation creates. The situation is especially ironic when one realizes that increasingly, corporate leaders expect their management teams to approach the reputation-building and maintenance process in a disciplined, integrated fashion. The professionals are beginning to pick up on this concern.

A paper commissioned by the National Investor Relations Institute in the U.S. makes a strong case for integrating corporate communications.

It states the benefits of integration include preserving corporate brands, enhancing reputation, weathering crises and maximizing organizational potential. The paper says integration does not have to mean centralization.

The critical consideration is that mechanisms and processes are in place to allow the communications professionals to coordinate information and feedback so that they speak in harmony to all the organization's constituencies.

The paper identifies four factors driving the need to integrate:

- 1. Regulation** – which makes it illegal to favour some investors with information that is not provided at the same time to all the organization's shareholders;
- 2. Overlapping constituencies** – the realization that the concept of a world occupied by discreet groups of stakeholders is artificial. In fact, investors can also be employees, customers, community activists, advocates for the environment and so on;
- 3. Organizational growth**, via merger and acquisition for example, creating size and complexity to which communications functions need to adapt; and
- 4. Technology** – as in the Internet – that continues to erode the organization's ability to control information while making significant research and mass communications capability available to just about any group or individual with a cause or interest.

The paper suggests the integration occur at the strategic management level. This would require the various communications functions to cooperate so that:

- a) what they plan to do relates to the real needs of the business;**
- b) their programs are coordinated and not working at cross purposes; and**
- c) the formal and informal feedback they work with is shared.**

If one accepts, as I do, that hyper specialization is a reality in corporate communications today, then one probably agrees that message crafting is best done by the specialist closest to the stakeholder.

One of the problems with this of course is that intense specialization can erode professional communications values and sensibilities.

Another is that the specialist can become too narrowly focused. He or she can lose sight of the fact that the investor, customer, regulator and employee are often the same entity.

Outright misunderstanding of the communications process is a third.

Good communications pros know that in the final analysis it's all about substance. Bennett Freeman, Senior Counselor in Corporate Responsibility with Burson-Marsteller, hit this nail on the head in the Tisdall Lecture he delivered to the CPRS National Conference in Calgary in 2005:

"First and foremost, substance sells and 'messaging' is secondary to the substance of the message. Corporate responsibility is fundamentally about making and delivering on substantive policy and business commitments in ways that are transparent and accountable to stakeholders..."

In other words, transparency and authenticity are essential qualities of effective corporate communications programs. So while we can't expect to craft all of the corporate communications messages our organizations convey, we have a responsibility to help ensure that at least the strategic ones aren't the product of some well-intended amateur who thinks that spin doctoring is what we do.

One of our main roles is to help our organizations find and maintain their voices in the big conversation that marks an open society. With this comes the responsibility to help ensure that the quality and integrity of the conversation aren't compromised in the process. In fact, this is our overriding professional responsibility and one of our biggest professional challenges.

This is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Jeff Roach, APR, Coordinator of the Corporate Communications Program, Seneca College, during a recent meeting of the Canadian Institute in Toronto.

Ethical Blogging

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raised the ire of the social media crowd. As Terry Fallis of Thornley-Fallis Communications cautions on his weekly podcast, *Inside PR*, "you will never be criticized for being too transparent."

What bloggers want organizations to know is that what is not yet out in the open will quickly be discovered, because this is what bloggers do. Unethical behavior exposed by an online audience will gain even greater publicity than ever before. This is true for both regular corporate actions in the marketplace but also in regard to its activity in the blogosphere.

It is said that the web never forgets. So it's best to tread lightly in the blogosphere until you have achieved some familiarity and credibility there.

In the absence of a firm code of ethics among bloggers, any initiative that straddles the line can become the subject of continued online discussion. Most of us would prefer that online chatter focus on our message more than our message delivery platform.

For more information about astroturfing and ghost-blogging check out the Anti-Astroturfing section on www.thenewpr.com for the former and have a listen to Episode 59 of *Inside PR*, a weekly PR Podcast with David Jones and Terry Fallis for the latter.

Parker Mason is Communications Coordinator at CNW Group and is actively involved in the world of blogging. He can be reached at parker.mason@newswire.ca.

Chapter NEWS



Free Tickets for Student Members

Toronto Hydro is sponsoring 10 student members for selected professional development and networking events. Check the website regularly for upcoming events and be one of the first 10 to reply for a free ticket.

Volunteers Needed

The Membership Committee of CPRS (Toronto) is looking for assistance in building and executing a plan to retain and attract new members through such initiatives as welcome calls, exit surveys, an annual survey, book reviews and member's profiles. To inquire or express your interest, contact Daniel Torchia, Membership Chair at 416-341-9929 (ext. 223) or daniel@torchiacom.com.

The CPRS (Toronto) Student Volunteer Team is a valuable learning tool for students interested in building their portfolios and gaining industry exposure. Hone your writing and event planning skills, build relationships and expand your network. Volunteer positions include class representatives, event volunteers and student steering committee members. Send your resume and cover letter to cprsstudent@yahoo.ca.

CPRS (Toronto) Welcomes New Members

Thirteen communications and public relations professionals and 18 students have recently joined the Canadian Public Relations Society.

Student Members...

Connie Allaster, *Mohawk College*
Meghan Billingsley,
Guelph-Humber University
Kerri Birtch, *Ryerson University*
Panagiota Bountis, *York University*
Josie Haynes, *Humber College*
Priyanka Jain, *Seneca College*
Merrill Kelly, *Cambrian College*
Robert Kirsic, *Humber College*
Christine Law, *Humber College*
Emilia Marceta, *Seneca College*

Kathryn McBride, *Seneca College*
Christopher Needles,
Centennial College
Meghan Neufeld, *Boston University*
Ivona Radon, *Seneca College*
Tatiana Read, *Seneca College*
Ameena Robert, *Ryerson University*
Alex Walderman,
University of Western Ontario
Lena Wan, *Ryerson University*

National Members...

Lori Abbott, *SickKids Foundation*
Mark Clancy, *Ministry of Transportation*
Jane Collins, *Alliance Atlantis Communications Inc.*
Siobhan Dooley, *TD Bank Financial Group*
Carol Dunsmore,
Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan
Ann Gallery, *High View Communications*
Rupinder Gill,
Alliance Atlantis Communications Inc.

Joan Haines, *Coastal International*
Elizabeth Hendricks, *Secruit*
Marilyn Hood, *Region of Peel*
Patricia Krale,
Greater Toronto Airports Authority
Teresa McDonald,
Canadian Red Cross Society
Deborah Reid, *Reid Et Associates*

APR NEWS

2008 Accreditation Application Deadline is December 3rd

If you're thinking about doing your APR in 2008, December 3, 2007 is the deadline to submit your application, work sample overview and the \$400 application fee to the CPRS National Office. Please visit the CPRS (Toronto) website, www.cprstoronto.com or national CPRS site, www.cprs.ca for more information about the process and valuable resources. If you have any questions, please contact Martin Waxman, Toronto APR committee chair, mwaxman@palettepr.com.

New APR Word Mark

A new APR word mark designating the professional status for public relations practitioners was recently unveiled. "The APR is the global professional standard of excellence in public relations," said Sharlene Smith, APR, Fellow CPRS (Presiding Officer on the National Accreditation Council). "This new word mark will help employers and clients hiring public relations practitioners recognize that when they hire APRs they are getting leaders in public relations that are recognized in and outside of the profession for their knowledge, experience, expertise and ethics."



The word mark is available for accredited members to use on business cards, letterhead and websites. To view the new logo and get a high resolution image, visit: www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e_aprinfo.asp or call 416-239-7034.

New APR Pins

The new APR logo is available on a silver lapel pin for \$15 each (plus GST), including delivery, for all accredited CPRS Members. Please visit cprs.ca to view the new design and to order online or call 416-239-7034.

New Online Accreditation Maintenance

All APRs can review their accreditation file online to find out the year they were accredited, to find out when their next accreditation maintenance is due, to maintain an online record of their maintenance activities, and to submit their maintenance activities online. If you want to review your accreditation status online or start an accreditation maintenance file online please see www.cprs.ca/accreditation/e_maintenance.asp.

CPRS Awards 2007 Novikoff Award to David Grier, APR

David Grier, APR was awarded the Philip A. Novikoff Memorial Award at the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) Annual Conference in Edmonton.

"The Novikoff Award is presented to an accredited member of the Society who has advanced the standing of the public relations profession in Canada over time through professional and public relations practice, service to CPRS and the community overall," said Karen Dalton, APR, Executive Director, CPRS National.

"This public relations professional has, over the course of his dynamic and important career, furthered the standing of the public relations profession in Canada," added President Derrick Pieters, APR, Fellow CPRS. "Grier has proven to be a pioneer in three fundamental areas: developing strategic solutions; providing public relations counsel at the senior management level; and embracing corporate social responsibility."

"Throughout his career, David has demonstrated a commitment to ethical public relations practice and, in the process, has become a role model for countless practitioners beyond him. David is most deserving of his prestigious award," noted the selection committee.

"It was evident in reading supporting documentation that he has demonstrated sound professional practice of public relations during his career, and has certainly advanced the practice by his pioneering theory and attitude in specific public relations fields. The echoing of the words mentor, sound advice, leader in corporate social responsibility all appear to make this person a worthy recipient," Dalton said.

Grier began his public relations career with Du Pont of Canada in 1956 and worked there with a two-year hiatus (1959-1961) until 1967 when he joined the Royal Bank of Canada to establish a public relations department. He retired from the Royal Bank in 1995, as Vice-President and Special Advisor, Corporate Affairs, and Executive Director, Royal Bank of Canada Charitable Foundation.

He joined CPRS in 1969 and has been a member for 38 years, and received his Accredited in Public Relations (APR) designation in 1973 and was granted Life Membership in the Society this year.

Established in 1989 in memory of public relations professional Philip A. Novikoff, the Award has been given to 12 recipients to date.

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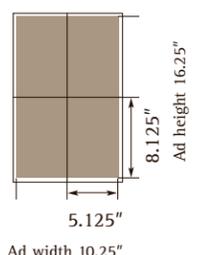
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CEOs Cashing in on Media Coverage

Publicity Pays in a Big Way for CEOs.

A study of how the compensation of 1,500 US CEOs rose in the year after getting featured in the media showed that a single article featuring a CEO in a major business publication such as FORTUNE, Business Week, Wall Street Journal or New York Times, raised a CEO's salary and bonuses by \$600,000 US on average.

A magazine cover story resulted in an average raise of about \$1.1 million US, according to Markus Fitza, lead author of the study done by the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado.

No Canadian executives were included in the survey, but one of its authors told The Globe and Mail that he had little doubt that executives profiled in the Globe's business pages, the cover of Report on Business Magazine or Canadian Business magazine would see the same kind of salary increase.

The more positive mentions in the business media in a year a CEO received, the higher the raise in compensation. The author told the Globe that a CEO's publicity has a direct effect on raising the opinions of the outside members of boards of directors who may not be familiar with what the CEO does on a daily basis. An interesting finding was that negative coverage for a CEO was almost never followed by a reduction in pay.

You Can't Spin Mother Nature

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A second sample of mainstream media between 1998 and 2002 found that in 53% of the stories, reporters gave ink to one "expert" affirming that climate change is a problem and one "expert" denying it. The media was presenting a science controversy that didn't exist, usually without mentioning when skeptical "experts" were working for Exxon-funded think tanks.

The record shows that we in the PR industry have a unique power to influence public opinion. Philip Morris has proved you can win with spin – for a while.

But you can't spin Mother Nature. Climate science isn't troublesome legislation that government can rewrite.

The climate is changing and if we waste time denying or spinning it, we will miss our chance to help fix the problem and to position our clients as credible and responsible.

If we hope to recover our reputation, public relations professionals need to distance ourselves from questionable PR practices and speak out against unethical tactics. We need to encourage our clients to act decisively and honourably.

Canadian PR giant Charles Tisdall always said that public relations people, like journalists, serve the public interest as much as their employers. If we hope to recover our reputation, we must be sure that's the truth.

James Hoggan delivered the Diana and Charles Tisdall Lecture in Communications at the Canadian Public Relations Society's National Conference in Edmonton in June. This is an abridged version prepared for CPRS Toronto.

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Jeff Lake, Editor

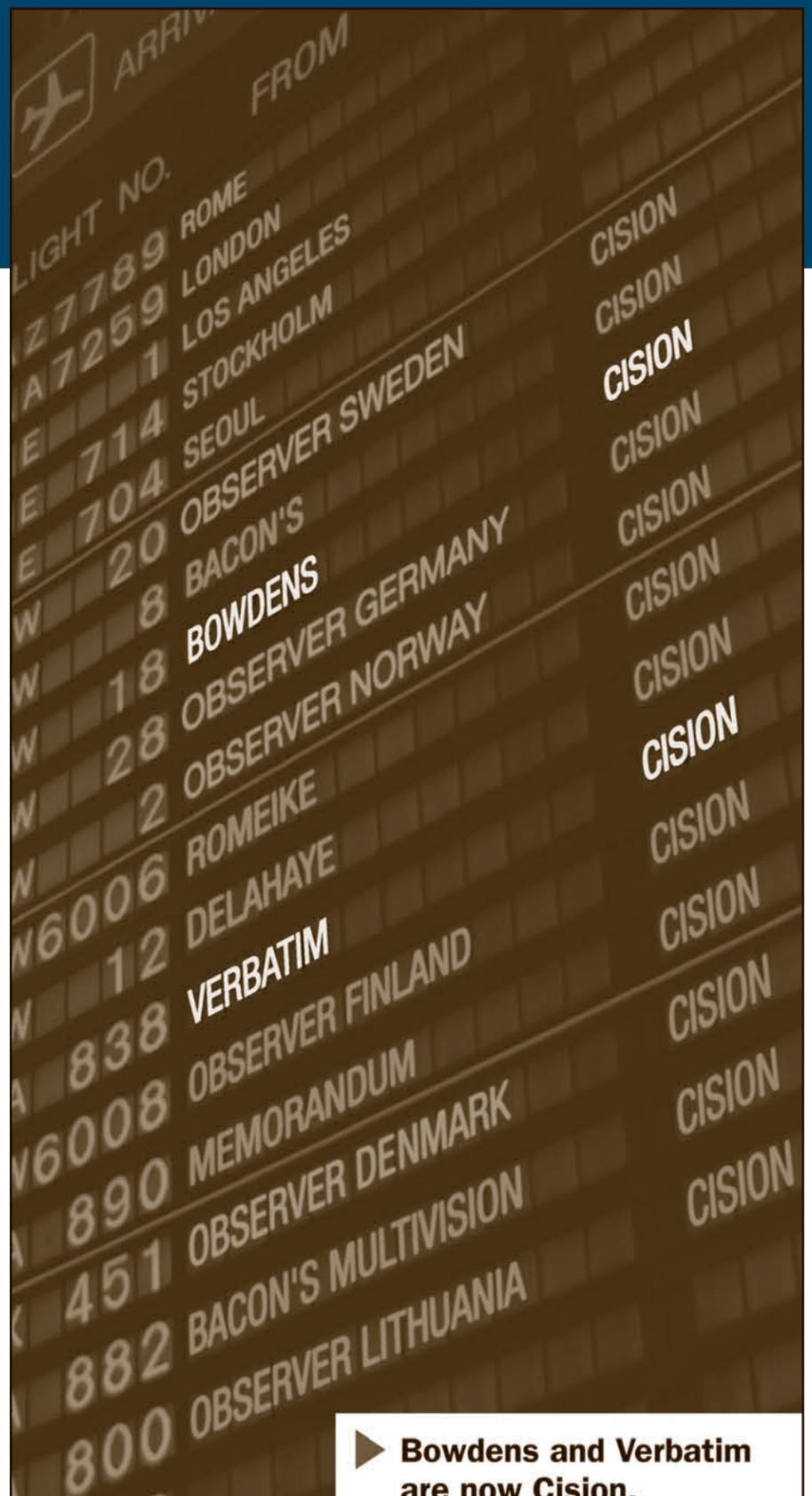
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