

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

Expert Column



# A burgeoning media landscape

**Are local PR programs worth the effort? You bet.**

By Christa Miller, client-service manager, Gibbs & Soell

It doesn't take a professor of mathematics to calculate the Research Triangle region's growth — even a novice can see that the area is booming. Today, the region is home to more than 1.5 million people, and according to projections from the Research Triangle Regional Partnership (RTRP), by 2020 the area's population will swell to more than 2.4 million, making it larger than present-day Charlotte, San Antonio, Orlando, or New Orleans.

Why is this growth important to communicators and businesses? Simply put, your audience is expanding daily in your own back yard. Those who have lived in the Triangle for the past two decades remember back to when the local media market included a handful of newspapers and TV stations. Today, the area has a myriad of

information sources — including a multitude of specialty publications focusing on real estate, newcomers and women — and many boast growing readership.

### Local market share

According to a 2003 Nielsen Media research study, 78 percent of adults listen to the radio daily, 55 percent read a weekday newspaper — with 63 percent reading weekend editions — and 81 percent of households subscribe to magazines. Even with booming Internet news sources, people continue to consume news and information from a variety of media outlets. In other words, consider your options. It's easy to miss the forest for the trees.

Take biotechnology companies as an example. With North Carolina ranked No. 3 in biotechnology nationally, the state

boasts renowned university and research institutions, and the region is home to leading pharmaceutical companies and health-care organizations. Certainly, there is value for these organizations to get their messages in front of this influential audience.

Wisely, many local creative firms stress to business clients that local media relations should be a portion of the overall marketing mix.

One reason this makes sense as professional communicators is the trust that local readerships place in their nearby publications. In fact, a worldwide survey conducted by Harris Interactive, which included a sample of almost 9,000 adult readers from seven countries, found that local papers were the most trusted among media outlets.

According to the Harris report, "A high number of respondents — more than 75 percent — consider local newspapers and their associated Web sites extremely important because of their role as community watchdogs, in clarifying important global issues, and providing relevant information that is interesting to know and useful in daily life."

Readers aren't simply perusing local newspapers and magazines; they're consuming information, applying it to their lives and internalizing it. Now that's a message with power.

When contemplating your next communications move, don't forget that local efforts merit consideration. Whether you turn that component over to a trusted agency partner or elect to keep that piece of the mix in-house, focusing on the growing number of media outlets in the region amid this booming economic environment simply makes sense. ☉

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