

GIBBS & SOELL

Insight

FOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS

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Mark Organizational Milestones by Giving Back

As we look back on 40 years at Gibbs & Soell, we are grateful to our clients, employees and advocates, whose support makes our existence possible. Looking back, we realize this rich experience gives us a solid foundation for the future.

However, we are also compelled to ask, "Does our anniversary matter to anyone else?"

When founders Dick Gibbs and Dick Soell opened the PR firm's doors for business, the freshman class of business entrepreneurs that year included the creators of Starbucks and Lucasfilm. It was 1971.

Four decades later, these brands remain part of the business fabric. None among us is impervious to adversity, but all have survived because we have adjusted to the changed environment. And the changes have been dramatic—a landscape razed of brands from the retail, banking, automotive and publishing industries.

Does brand longevity hold the same value today for a public that has witnessed the demise of once-mighty institutions that had survived for multiple generations?

Anniversary Frenzy

The public relations industry cannot deny its love affair with anniversaries. There have been enough to fill the annual Chase's Calendar of Events since 1957. But this wasn't always the case.

Before the late 19th century, anniversaries of less than 50 years typically were not cause for public celebration. It took Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 to start the frenzy, according to *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Souvenirs included stamps and coins, the first ever issued for a royal event. By the time the monarch reached her diamond jubilee ten years later, the festivities grew to include a spectacular parade. Six film crews paid for the rights to secure good vantage points along the route lined by about 3 million people.

Since then occasions falling on anniversary years divisible by five have inspired many a PR campaign. Modern tendencies to commemorate may have less to do with the need for lavish attention than a desire to acknowledge survival amid rough conditions. When Charles Darwin, a contemporary of Queen Victoria's, wrote about "survival of the fittest," he could have just as easily been referring to the mortality rate of businesses.

According to the Web site of the U.S. Small Business Administration, "Seven out of 10 new employer firms survive at least two years, half at least five years, a third at least 10 years and a quarter stay in business 15 years or more."



REMEMBERING THOSE IN NEED: PROJECT HAITI

Gibbs & Soell would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to clients, employees and associates and to remind everyone of this special time of year – a time when we reflect, hope, dream and set new goals.

Each year, Gibbs & Soell selects a charity and makes a donation on behalf of those whose commitment and support we deeply value. This year, we chose Project Haiti, a mission led by the U.S. Green Building Council to construct a LEED-certified Orphanage and Children's Center in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. We hope this facility will serve as a beacon of hope for the people and orphans of Haiti who are facing ongoing devastation following the earthquake of January 2010.

Should we raise a glass to self-preservation? Unlike organizations and products, a brand is an intangible resource leveraged primarily for communication and legal identification.

However, there's no doubt that a strong brand is a strategic asset; a symbol of the promise a business or organization makes to its stakeholders.

Keeping your word ought to be good for a toast or two.

Keeping Promises

As professional communicators, we play critical roles in upholding brand promises every day. But it's not a perfect world, and promises aren't always kept. Too many broken promises later, the public now questions the value of brand continuity more than ever.

Is the raging debate about whether some companies should be deemed "too big to fail" really about something else? Strip the term of its Washington and Wall Street veneers and you get to the emotional heart of the matter: Businesses have to earn the right to stick around.

There are positive signs of a shift in thinking about anniversaries. A recent search for "anniversary" on a news release distribution site yielded celebratory announcements ranging from an organization hitting its two-year milestone to one observing its 125th year in business. It was encouraging to see that a fair amount of the corporate news did not involve promotional giveaways or gimmicky merchandizing.

Rubies are the traditional gift commemorating a 40th anniversary. However, our organization is more interested in giving back as we look forward. Sharing ourselves

GIBBS & SOELL 40th ANNIVERSARY

Dick Gibbs and Dick Soell established Gibbs & Soell, Inc. (G&S) as an independent public relations firm in March 1971. For the first few weeks, Soell's apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan served as the fledgling PR firm's base until it moved to an office on Madison Avenue. The agency quickly made a name for itself, and its success led to the openings of full-service offices in Chicago (1974), Raleigh, N.C. (1988) and Zurich, Switzerland (2000).

G&S is proud to look back on four decades of business achievements, but it is also energized by what it sees on the horizon. In celebration of our 40th anniversary this year, we also honor the people and communities that have helped create an environment of success at G&S over many years.


Visit www.gibbs-soell.com and click the Facebook button to view the personal stories of G&S employees and associates as they voluntarily support not-for-profit organizations with their time, talents and funds.

with others, we've decided, is a gift more precious than rubies.

As we celebrate, we'll be keeping these thoughts in mind:

- **Pledge resources for community involvement.** Genuine CSR requires neither a yardstick nor a bullhorn. Identify a real need in your community and commit time, money or contacts to help.
- **Acknowledge heroism among employees and clients.** Businesses cannot thrive without passionate employees and clients. Supporting the causes they dedicate themselves to personally can also be a strong motivator at work.

- **Keep it going.** Creating a special initiative rings hollow if there's an expiration date. So perpetuate purpose beyond the anniversary.

As President Woodrow Wilson said, "You are not here merely to make a living. You are here to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and to impoverish yourself if you forget the errand." 

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