

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

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**Media/Marketing**

## Follow the swinging clock: Corporate hypnotism

**Peter Van Allen**

Hugh Braithwaite, president of Braithwaite Communications in Philadelphia, once heard a reporter say he was only interested in story ideas with "flash and grab."

The other day he called me with one of those stories.

It had to do with corporate hypnotism. That's right, the art of drawing real response from consumers.

According to a Salon.com story in 1999, Starbucks hypnotized a bunch of its 20-something employees about why so few young people actually come to the stores. In hypnotic trance, employees said stuff they'd never admit to otherwise — for instance, that Starbucks was for guys in their 40s wearing suits. The only people like them were across the counter.

British Airways, Procter & Gamble and Bed Bath & Beyond are three others that have reportedly used hypnosis to elicit more honest response from consumers.

"It's a pleasant, relaxing experience," said Braithwaite. "It's the opposite the typical stuff, conference-room marketing sessions.

"You get more honesty. You get more instinctual answers than the typical 'consumerese.'"

Now, using Braithwaite as a go-between, Philadelphia's own Doubletree Hotel has hired a corporate hypnotist to interview meeting planners, the people who book conventions and corporate meetings at hotels and places like the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

The question the hypnotists will ask is, "Why do meeting planners choose one hotel over another?"

"Under hypnosis, we're hoping to get a deeper understanding" of the decision-making process meeting planners go through, Braithwaite said. "We'll put them under. They're happy to do this. Meeting planners are always looking to improve the process."

### **Media buys**

Wal-Mart may be the largest employer in the state, but when it comes to advertising spending by discount department stores in Philadelphia, the Bentonville, Ark.-based big box can't hold a candle to Kohl's.

Through the first half of the year, Kohl's spent \$3.6 million on advertising in local media — including newspapers, TV, cable and radio, according to VMS Voicetrak, the Tucson, Ariz.-based company.

Sears (\$2.4 million), Kmart (\$2.2 million), JCPenney (\$1.8 million), Value City (\$1.5 million), Target (\$1.4 million) and Ames (\$1.3 million) also outspent Walmart on local advertising spending. Through the first half of the year, Wal-Mart spent \$1.17 million on local advertising, including newspaper, TV and a small amount of radio.

### **'Round town**

Lately, the Trenton-based Journal Register Co., has been on a buying binge and compiled an impressive roster of weekly and daily newspapers, including the Pottstown Mercury, Norristown Times-Herald and Delaware County Daily Times.

As the area's largest daily, the Philadelphia Inquirer, hunkers down for the battle of the 'burbs, the Journal Register doesn't seem to be shy about its network of newspapers encircling Philadelphia.

A reader writes: "Did you ever notice that the Web address for Journal Register is AllAroundPhilly.com? The Web address for Philly newspapers is Philly.com ... Get the joke here? Their goal was to totally surround The Inky and Daily News like a collar. Seems to be working."

### **People on the move**

Gretchen Toner, former press secretary for the state Department of Education, has been named vice president of communications at the Philadelphia Zoo. She will be the zoo's chief spokesperson and provide strategic direction and leadership for all communications. The Delaware County native spent seven years in Harrisburg in the administrations of Govs. Tom Ridge and Mark Schweiker ... Brian Kiley, former senior manager of business development at Rosenbluth International, has been named senior account executive in the B2B area of Schubert Communications Inc., Downingtown.

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