

PR MEASUREMENT CASE STUDY

Before-and-After Research

Measuring Public Relations Effectiveness For The Dole Food Company and the Society for Nutrition Education

By Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann

Situation

The Dole Food Company, in collaboration with the Society for Nutrition Education, developed a CD-ROM program designed to educate third grade students and their teachers about the importance of proper nutrition and the role that eating five servings of fruits or vegetables a day can play in achieving proper nutrition. Third grade students and teachers in 178 classes in 65 schools in five different states were selected by Dole to participate in a "pilot" test of the CD-ROM educational program.

Objective

Dole, working in concert with the New York City office of Ketchum Public Relations and the agency's Research and Measurement Department, was interested in measuring the knowledge, attitude and behavior levels of a selected group of third grade teachers and their students regarding fruits and vegetables and proper nutrition, both before and after these audiences were exposed to the CD-ROM educational program, prior to a national rollout.

Audiences

The target audiences were third grade students and their teachers in selected schools in California, Georgia, Minnesota, New York and Texas.

Research Approach

A three-phased research design was developed consisting of...

- 1) Distribution of self-administered questionnaires to approximately 1,000 students and 40 teachers to measure awareness, attitude and behavior levels *before* the CD-ROM introduction;
- 2) Conducting of a qualitative telephone poll with one-fourth, or 10, of the teachers at the *mid-point* of the program's introduction to monitor and track teacher views and concerns pertaining to the program while it was underway;
- 3) Distribution of a self-administered questionnaire to the same approximately 1,000

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students and 40 teachers to measure awareness, attitude and behavior levels four months *after* the program introduction had been completed.

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Completed, matched pre and post questionnaires were filled out and returned by students in 44 of the 178 classes. In those 44 classes, 1,123 students filled out pre and 1,038 students filled out post questionnaires; 37 teachers filled out pre and 40 teachers filled out post questionnaires.

Results

The data found the 5 A Day Adventures CD-ROM program to be extremely successful. Among the findings:

- 1) *Before* they were exposed to the program, students correctly answered only 5 out of 18 “test” questions pertaining to proper nutrition. Four months *after* exposure to the program, the same students correctly answered 11 of the 18 questions. More importantly, the proportion of students giving correct answers increased from the *before* to the *after* phase on 17 of the 18 questions that were asked.
- 2) The proportion of students expressing an interest in talking to other family members about the importance of eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day increased from 45.1% *before* they had been exposed to the program, to 67.0% *after* exposure.
- 3) More than 8 out of every 10 teachers felt their students had found the program easy to use and a similar proportion of teachers were convinced that 5 A Day Adventures had encouraged their students to eat more fruits and vegetables. Eight-in-b of the teachers also felt the program had encouraged they, themselves, to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- 4) All but two of the teachers gave Dole very high marks for creating 5 A Day Adventures and most rated the teacher support materials that came with the program as very or somewhat helpful.

Based on the research findings, Dole modified the CD-ROM program and then launched a national rollout. One year after the research had been completed, 13,000 schools throughout the U.S. were participating in the program and 50,000 CD-ROM disks had been distributed to schools and teachers across the country.

In 1995, this particular research project received a Bronze Anvil award for excellence in evaluation research, as part of the annual competition sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America. Further information about this case may be obtained by contacting Ketchum’s recently retired director of research, Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann, 4 Wren Court, Palmyra, Virginia 22963-2 126. Telephone: 434-589-5822; E-mail address: lindenmann@cstone.net.