

Ferdie J. Deering

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'PR' Part of Information Freedom

ONE of the country's most sophisticated businesses is that of convincing the public, sometimes referred to as public relations.

From the time the alarm clock rings until bedtime, somebody is trying to convince you, me and everybody of something. By means of newspapers with their news items, editorials and advertisements, radio, television, word of mouth, gestures, signs, signal lights, letters, magazines, books, billboards and telephones, the messages pour in upon us.

The business of convincing involves every phase of our lives, with people trying to get us to get up, to go to work, to speak, to shut up, to buy, to sell, to obey laws, to drive slowly, to vote, to contribute or to do scores of other things.

During the recent election campaigns, more professional promoters were called in by candidates than ever before to convince the public, but not all of them did. One political consultant said that every ambitious candidate needs a pollster, a planning director, a fund raiser, a TV specialist, a direct mail expert, and finally an issue analyst. In the old days, about all a candidate needed was an issue and a loud voice. Many have won without the issue.

Sometimes public relations efforts catch on, as they may with a sharp slogan, but they also may be distorted. A current example is the administration's "Whip Inflation Now," where skeptical Washingtonians are wearing their "WIN" buttons upside down to read "NIM" and mean "No

Immediate Miracles." Another bright idea that flickered out was the California PR man's Oklahoma billboard campaign embroidering the slogan "God bless Governor Hall."

Executives of major oil companies, meeting in New York, were advised by one of their own members, by an outside speaker, and by a member of the President's cabinet to work harder at convincing the public of their worth.

Most public relations firms probably are engaged by industries and businesses to help advertise and sell their products, but they also are widely used by universities, churches, chambers of commerce, individuals seeking more public attention,

and all sorts of professional, trade and social organizations and institutions.

Farmers and ranchers, through their associations, have been conducting active campaigns to convince the public, business and Congress for many years. They work on farm policy, the agricultural way of life, and the merits of beef, pork, poultry, dairy products, wheat, feed grains and soybeans.

The amount of information that is directed toward us each day is overwhelming, and more is on the way. It is a good enough excuse for any confusion that may afflict us, but it is a part of our traditional freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the public's right to know.