

Business, press need not be at odds. . .

(Continued from page 11) ge heard from business people is that the press has an anti-business bias. The complaint normally arises when a newspaper reports a story that casts an industry or a company or an executive in a bad light. Stories of consumer fraud, labor trouble, unethical practices, shoddy products, executive infighting and the sort are likely to be cited as evidence that the newspaper publishing them is antibusiness.

I think this perception of anti-business bias stems from a misunderstanding of what the journalist is doing, and his motives for doing it. The businessman looks at a story and focuses on its effects; is this story good for my business, or bad for my business? If it is harmful to his business, the business person tends to assume that the motivation to do damage must be there—otherwise, why run the story?

But, in my experience at least, that isn't the way journalists think, and it is not the way they evaluate stories. Reporters and editors tend to think of the story as an end in itself, not a means to the end.

A story is not judged by what effect it might have on business—good or bad—but on its intrinsic qualities; is it interesting? is it significant? do many people in our community have some stake in this situation—a job or income or some other pocketbook factor?

Journalists don't tend

to ask whether this story is good or bad for XYZ Company. We ask whether a story contains fresh or interesting information or insight into a situation many people care about.

You may say we should look at the presumed effect before publishing the story. After all, don't we care about the consequences of our work? Yes, we do care, but our goal is not to have one effect or the other, but merely to publish information and analyze its meaning, and then let the chips fall where they may.

If you think about it, I don't think you'd want newspapers to operate with any other goal.

The honest, neutral newspaperman cannot make judgments based on projected effects of his story. Publishing a "negative" news story about business does not establish an anti-business bias on the part of the newspaper. The journalist is coming at the story with an entirely different mental framework, and different goals than the businessman would—and I fear that few people in business either perceive or understand this radically different perspective.

A second and related complaint is that the press concentrates excessively on negative stories about business. This, in fact, is the age-old lament about news in general: too much of it is bad news about murder, mayhem, disaster, war, rape, and pillage. For

business, that translates into too much stress on fraud, scandal, strikes, business failure, conflict of interest.

What they remember

Much of the news is negative, in the sense that it examines society's troubles and woes rather than quiet triumphs or bland normalcy. We report the one airplane that goes down killing 80 people, not about the thousands and others that land safely every day. If we ran a story every day saying that 50 airplanes landed safely at Des Moines airport yesterday, how long would it be before you quit reading that story?

So it is inevitable that news will deal heavily with the surprising, the unusual, the threatening and the outrageous aspects of human affairs, including business. Those stories tend to be the ones remembered by business people, especially those pained by them, but they are not by any means the total agenda of our business news coverage. We are just as interested in business success stories and more positive news—

If you build a better mousetrap you may discover newspapermen aren't such rats after all.

In my view, there is one, major overriding problem that unfavorably shapes the relationship of the press and business. And the fact is that the most businessmen don't want to have anything to do with a reporter. They do not make themselves available to the press and yet later complain that the press does not under-

stand or reflect their side of the story.

Many businessmen are just plain afraid of reporters. They are afraid reporters won't understand the complexities of their business, won't quote them accurately, or will take what they say out of context. They prefer to do what that coal industry official who called me wants to do: that is hide.

But hiding doesn't work. The press will write about your company or your industry whether or not you decide to talk to a reporter. There are plenty of other sources of information.

If you let outside sources shape the story, you can't very well complain about the outcome.

Different goals
Business and the press do not share the same

goals, but our differing goals are not mutually exclusive. The purpose of business is to make a profit by providing some wanted product or service. If you do that honestly, within the law and within the bounds of ethics, you have nothing to apologize for, and no reason to be afraid to deal with the press.

The purpose of the press is to inform and to enlighten people on matters that are important to their lives. We have a right and an obligation, to do that with vigor, to the best of our ability.

Mr. Gannon is executive editor of the Des Moines Register and Tribune. This article is a condensation of an address he gave at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, on October 24, 1979.

Three women run it all . . .

(Continued from page 13) ate another smaller warehouse for their book distribution. It is a 14,000 square foot building also on Armstrong Avenue where John Elliott started the business in 1964, while he was station agent for the CNR and a licensed custom broker since 1958.

The two daughters realize the hard work demanded of their father and mother when they launched the fledgling

business, and through the years from the time Norma became manager for Fawcett Publications, then Avon, and became well-known in the book business leading its present position as sole supplier in Canada for six big publishers.

The female threesome are modest about their achievement, but there's a suppressed glee in their eyes as they obviously have a ball making it in a man's world.

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