



DRILLING AHEAD

The energy industry's positive public image: An oxymoron?

Mike Killalea, Editor & Publisher

FOR AN INDUSTRY that fuels the world economy, ensuring that the US and Western European public can continue the plush, cozy lifestyles they take for granted, we sure rank low in the eyes of that affluent public. Our industry enjoys public approval just a notch above trial lawyers and used-car salesmen, according to survey data developed by **Wirthlin Worldwide** for the American Petroleum Institute. This information was presented at the IADC/SPE Drilling Conference, 2-4 March in Dallas, as part of a 3-part Plenary Session examining the topic "Changing Our Image for Long-term Growth".

The statistics reveal, somewhat astonishingly, that we are to some extent a victim of our own success. That is, the oil and gas industry has proven itself so adept that we are taken for granted. Joe Public is smug in the belief, for starters, that a convenient network of gasoline stations will always stand ready to pump a steady stream of petrol, that he may roar down the thoroughfares blissfully unaware of the process behind that filled tank.

Our time-tested efficiency has produced high expectations in our reliability, safety and low price. The occasional hiccup in any of those unleashes fury and paranoia, and calls for government inquiries are shrill above the voice of reasoned explanation.

Price spikes arouse the most excitement. The US is now in the midst of one for gasoline. This morning, I read that gasoline prices in California had set a new record. People are howling. Yet, as **GlobalSantaFe Corp** Chairman **Bob Rose** pointed out at the Drilling Conference, no one thinks twice about forking over \$4/liter for bottled water—nearly 8 times the highest-price gasoline in the US. And as my estimable boss **Lee Hunt**, President of IADC, pointed out in an editorial in an earlier issue,

Starbucks coffee rings up at more than \$22/gallon.

SWEET REASON

Ah, sweet reason. This industry has an almost touching faith that reason and science will persuade even the fiercest industry opponent. We reason that a knowledge of our technology will inspire admiration of our methods. In truth, the public cares little and knows less. **Andrew Cober** of Wirthlin told of a woman in a focus group who appreciated our industry's ingenuity in building petrol stations right over subsurface pools of gasoline, the better to pump right into her tank.

The opponents of this industry do not deal in reason, but emotion. One photo of an oil-smeared duck is worth a tanker-full of statistics on the true causes of offshore pollution (for you reason junkies, that's transportation, 45%; wastes and runoff, 36%, atmosphere, 9%; natural sources, 8%; and offshore production, 2%, according to the National Academy of Sciences).

THE SOFT SELL

Taking a logical approach to an emotional argument is like bringing a knife to a gunfight. Think of it as technology misapplied. Yet there's a world of terrific stories big and small ripe for the telling. **ExxonMobil** and **Pride International**, to pick on just two IADC members, have accomplished some truly astounding good works in Africa, among many locales.

Together and separately, these companies are improving public health through programs to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS and much-needed clinics, helping education from a virtual zero baseline by building and supplying schools and carving out an economic infrastructure of roads, rail, air strips and bridges.

How about jobs? Our industry provides a

lot of them, often in economically disenfranchised areas all around the world. Yet **J R Ewing** is apparently the public face of the typical oil guy.

The environment? **ChevronTexaco** has done yeoman's work in communicating stories about the industry's positive impact on the environment through its "People Do" television advertising campaign.

On a smaller scale, **DRILLING CONTRACTOR** published in our previous issue an article about the rescue in the South China Sea of two hapless loggerhead sea turtles ensnared in fishing net by **Diamond Offshore Drilling's** Ocean Baroness.

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

There are lots of positive stories. One of the problems, though, is we talk to the wrong people: We have met the audience, and they are us. We preach to the choir, convert the converted. (Guilty as charged, your honor!)

You don't need me to remind you that we're unlikely to get loads of help from the mainstream media. For instance, **ExxonMobil** raised \$21 million through employees and corporate matching for 9/11 Disaster Relief. The media remained largely silent, though.

Opportunities abound to get the industry's message out to the community at large—Rotary Clubs and other civic organizations, schools, church groups. Given half a chance, lots of these organizations would be receptive to our tales of gee-whiz technology, our social engagement and environmental commitment. They need speakers, and that's a commodity the drilling industry's executive corps can readily supply.

And save me a chair. ■

IADC/SPE DRILLING

If you were not among the nearly 1,700 industry professionals who turned out in Dallas for the '04 IADC/SPE Drilling Conference, you missed a great event. Mark your calendars for the next two:

- 23-25 Feb, 2005, Amsterdam: Chaired by **Mike Harris**, International Drilling Manager, **Apache Corp**, this is going to be a terrific conference;
- 21-23 Feb, 2006, Miami Beach: Yes, Miami Beach, Florida. IADC and SPE chose this location to encourage increased participation from Latin America and Europe, as well as North America. It's an exciting new venue for us, and one I'm sure our members will appreciate.

See you all there. ■