

PG&E fills VP post, gains on Wall St.

By Craig McGuire

SAN FRANCISCO: PG&E has promoted Gabriel Togneri to fill its newly created VP of IR post. Togneri, a 20-year PG&E vet, was formerly assistant treasurer and interim IR manager.

PG&E is one of the country's strongest energy brands, but its stock has stumbled in recent months. Dropping under \$20 several times, PG&E has slowly recovered and currently hovers just below its 52-week high of \$31.18.

PG&E also endured a major PR kidney punch earlier this year when the film *Erin Brockovich* portrayed the company as a remorseless environmental polluter.

H.D. Vest emerges with free tax stunt

By Craig McGuire

DALLAS: In a bold attempt to steal business—and publicity—away from competitors H&R Block and Intuit, Dallas-based e-financial services company H.D. Vest is offering over one million free Web-prepared and e-filed tax returns.

To implement this plan, which includes the launch of www.hdvest.com, the company enlisted Ogilvy last week for across-the-board PR. The agency is the company's first.

By offering the free service, Vest execs hope to heighten the company's profile, grow its tax-prep client base and attract business for its other financial service offerings.

"You start out with a tax return, which the people at Vest essentially consider a blueprint for an individual's financial planning needs, and go from there," said Ogilvy AE Nyree Wright. While Vest's goal is to prepare one million returns, Wright said the company will not charge clients even if that quota is exceeded.

FT.com taps PN for part of \$15m push

By Craig McGuire

NEW YORK: FT.com, the Internet arm of the *Financial Times*, has tapped Porter Novelli to provide the PR component of its \$15 million integrated marketing program, scheduled to run from September to the end of the year.

With FT.com still hammering out its marketing game plan, PN doesn't know how big a slice of the \$15 million pie it will receive. PN EVP Peter Hirsch, however, said the firm will provide both on- and offline PR and media outreach.

FT.com has assembled a slew of agencies for the campaign, including lead agency BBDO New York (print and TV advertising), PN, @tmosphere (online advertising) and Direct Partners (direct marketing).

Pincuses practice internal relations

In the highly competitive world of IR, sometimes it's not what you know or who you know. It's a question of branding.

Take Mark Pincus, for example. When he decided to bring his start-up Support.com public this year, he had a good idea where to look for IR support.

"He likes to tell his friends that this is a classic case of reverse nepotism," jokes proud papa and Financial Relations Board/BSMG prez Ted Pincus.

For the elder Pincus, Support.com is a welcome addition to the agency's roster.

"We have five children, but not one of them could be induced to go into IR," says Ted. "The others are law professors and doctors, so the opportunity to help one of my kids certainly gave me gratification."

Apparently, though, not enough to offer Support.com a special family rate.

"He pays the standard rate," Ted stresses. "The only break he gets is free advice at the family dinner table."

Agency vet opens his own NY shop

By Craig McGuire

NEW YORK: Thirty-year industry veteran George Rosenberg has struck out on his own, opening his own shop after stints at Burson-Marsteller, Cohn & Wolfe and KCSA Worldwide.

Based in NY, the Rosenberg Group will focus on corporate and marketing communications for new and established companies. Though the firm is currently a one-man outfit,

Rosenberg is searching for staffers and entertaining proposed partnerships.

"[It's] something I've wanted to do for a number of years, and my instinct tells me this was the time to do it," he said.

After 17 years at Burson, Rosenberg arrived at C&W in 1986, where he played a pivotal role in growing the agency into a national player. He has spent the last three years at KCSA.

"I'm gratified by the support I've received," he said. "I look forward to making my mark."

Newswires fortify foreign presence

By Craig McGuire

NEW YORK: Business Wire and PR Newswire, the two juggernauts of news release distribution, are stepping up their foreign invasions.

This week in Tel Aviv, Business Wire plans to announce the launch of Business Wire Israel. The news comes on the heels of BW's distribution deal with Pressrelations.de and a marketing pact with Infotec Communications. These two media outlets will help BW carve a niche in the European German-speaking markets, including Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Meanwhile, thanks to a distribution deal with ITWeb, BW moved into South Africa—a market where PRN made a significant push of its own recently.

PRN signed a deal late last month with BDFM to launch PR Newswire South Africa. BDFM is the publisher of *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* publications.

Last week PRN announced the debut of PR Newswire Asia, with its flagship office in Singapore. Other PRN office openings this year included Mexico, Taipei and the expansion of the Brazilian operation to include a Rio de Janeiro post.

A source close to the wire said that PRN is not done for 2000 and will open a handful of other bureaus later this year.

Hey PETA: nobody gives a cluck, OK?

Despite having garnered major media play for its protest of the treatment of rats (which became nouvelle cuisine) on *Survivor*, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals refuses to get off the *Survivor* bandwagon.

This time around, the group decided to voice its objections to the tragic fate that befell those three adorable little chickens—dubbed "Breakfast," "Lunch" and "Dinner" by the castaways. PETA set up an online poll for viewers to take a tribal council-style vote to kick the animals off the island. The choices: "I give a cluck! CBS should stop killing chickens and other animals" and "I don't care, I am a degenerate."

Alas, nobody really seemed to pay attention this time around. Could PETA have cried wolf—or, for that matter, rat—once too often?

Thomson brings Carson to IR fold

By Craig McGuire

TORONTO: Financial services powerhouse Thomson Corp. last week added the latest and largest piece to its investor relations puzzle with the acquisition of the Carson Group.

Carson, a research, surveillance and IR firm with \$50 million in revenues last year, will be combined with Thomson Financial Investor Relations, to form Thomson Financial/Carson.

That entity and Thomson's Intelligence Data arm make up the company's Corporate Group, now headed by CEO Dave Geliebter. Scott Ganeles, president of Carson, has been named COO of the group.

The Canadian firm first began building an IR machine five years ago, most notably through the buying of New York-based Technimetrics, an IR and shareholder service shop, from Knight Ridder.

Carson clients will have access to Thomson's resources, including its popular First Call research network.

"It's great for Carson, which now gets to play in a bigger sandbox with somebody else's sand," said Geliebter.