MEETINGS

Next at Greater Fort Worth PRSA

Cost: members $30, nonmembers $35, students $20; walk-ups add $5; park in the garage $2.50

Register by June 9

Time & date: 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesday, June 14

Place: Omni Hotel Fort Worth, 200 7th St., Omni Ballroom East

How to Survive a Layoff

Speaker: Joe Straus, Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives

Learn what to do and what not to do plus vital financial advice at a panel discussion Saturday, June 24, at UT Arlington. Details, as they emerge, here.

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An irreverent look at the people and events that keep us up at night

This column reflects the author’s views and is not intended to represent Greater Fort Worth PRSA.

Feat of Clay

A Monumental PR Stunt Washes Out. Sort Of.

Some PR teams, before they commit to a strategy, like to send up a trial balloon. Others plunge right in. The latter was the case in June 1995, when Michael Jackson’s PR team had a 30-foot statue of him built and then towed down London’s Thames River. The statue was intended to promote Jackson’s ambitious new album, ambitiously titled “HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I.”

Even for a man who once owned his own zoo, this was an aggressive ploy, and it was only a fraction of the campaign. In fact, the London statue was one of nine that were built. The other Michaels were to be strategically placed in various European capitals so that everyone could appreciate his magnificence (and buy tickets to his impending tour).

The “HIStory” album came out at a critical time for Jackson. In 1993 he had faced the first of the charges of inappropriate sexual activity. And in 1994 he married Lisa Marie Presley, a relationship that was suspected of not having sexual activity. Media coverage had not been kind to Michael, and it did not improve with this version of “Riverdance.”

The Associated Press graciously said the statue on the Thames was meant to recall “Queen Cleopatra’s triumphant voyage down the River Nile,” but Spin magazine described it as “Michael Jackson builds a monument to Michael Jackson,” adding that the statue made him look like a dictator.

The BBC was particularly critical. Jackson could have taken the $50 million he spent making the album and bought six Ferraris or a small hospital (but not, apparently, another amusement park). “Jackson is hoping it will be a symbol of a great comeback,” the BBC sniffed, “and not a monument to a failed record and a fading career.”

But even if the journalists turned up their noses, PR pros were kinder. Britain’s Taylor Herring and The Drum agencies, for example, declared this one of the top 50 publicity stunts. Drum also noted, however, that “Float it down the Thames?” had become a staple response during PR agency brainstorms, one “frequently fielded when there are no other ideas coming forth.”

But even if the Gloved One’s floating statue idea foundered, “HIStory” was a resounding success. The album received critical praise and went platinum several times over. Billie Jean also was said to have liked it, and she was not even his lover.

Which just goes to show that sometimes it’s okay to have a PR plan with a few holes in it — so long as you have a water-tight product.
Cindy Vasquez

SUMMER: Hair gets lighter. Skin gets darker. Water gets warmer. Drinks get
sweeter. Summer is almost here, which to me means juicy “beach reads,” weekends
by the pool, and fun family vacations to the beach and mountains. Work
remains a constant, but I enjoy how summer takes a break. The cooler weather
may not be the case this year.

GET A JOB

I'm a Fort Worth native, so the fact
that I stayed here might tell you a lot.

DO INTERNSHIP

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professional PR interning with Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital. The PR bug bit, and I
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