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**Issues advertising as crisis communication: Northwest Airlines' use of image restoration strategies during the 1998 pilot's strike.** Kimberly Cowden and Timothy L. Sellnow.

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This study explores the use of issues advertising as a form of organizational crisis communication. Specifically, the study analyzes Northwest Airline's (NWA) use of **image restoration** strategies in the issues advertisements it placed related to the 1998 pilots' strike. We conclude that issues advertising enabled NWA to be proactive in their attempt to reduce culpability for the strike. The evidence also suggests that NWA was able to retain passenger volume but failed to maintain investor confidence. NWA's persuasiveness was limited by the decision to offer only pseudo-corrective action, an inappropriate attempt at separation from its pilots and a failure to account for the relationship history with employees. The study concludes that issues advertising campaigns can incorporate **image restoration** strategies, serve as part of an organization's crisis management plan, and provide essential information to internal and external stakeholders.

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Late in the summer of 1998, Northwest Airlines (NWA) initiated one of its most extensive advertising campaigns. This campaign, however, was not designed to lure customers to the airline's seats. Rather, NWA used newspaper, radio, and television advertising to publicly defend its position prior to and during its 15-day pilots' strike. During the strike an estimated 2 million passengers were displaced and 31,000 NWA employees were temporarily laid off. Heath (1997) contends that issues campaigns, such as the one mounted by NWA, provide "opportunities for creating, altering, and using zones of meaning that can bring entities together in harmony rather than leave them pitted against one another" (p. 193). Heath further explains that zones of meaning are the "shared information and opinion that members of organizations and publics understand and hold dear" (p. 192). In the case of NWA's pilots' strike, the zones of fairness and corporate stability collided. The Airline Pilots Association (ALPA), representing NWA's pilots, argued that NWA's leadership was seeing record profits without adequately compensating employees for the concessions they made five years earlier when the company was struggling. Conversely, NWA claimed that the pilots were well compensated and that the company could not compete in the air transportation industry if it was forced to comply with the wage increases ALPA demanded. Thus, both sides in the strike sought to gain public support and legitimacy for their competing positions.

The danger of such a dispute is that it pits an internal stakeholder group against the organization's leadership. The risk for an organization in a strike situation is that its reputation might be damaged by claims from an internal stakeholder that are inconsistent with the organization's corporate story (van Riel, 1997). Brinson and Benoit (1999) describe this circumstance as separation. They explain that shifting blame to an internal stakeholder is difficult "because the target of blame is part of the entity that is claiming innocence" (p. 505). When the organization is responsible for providing consumers with products

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or services, such infighting can delegitimize both parties in the eyes of the public (Sethi, 1977). In this crisis situation both NWA's social legitimacy and its financial stability were threatened by the strike. Thus, NWA was motivated to seek a swift resolution to the crisis without compromising its financial stability. To do so, NWA publicly lobbied through an extensive issues advertising campaign for public support in actuating the crisis resolution it preferred. The purpose of the present study is to examine the case in an effort to determine the effectiveness of using issues advertisement in a crisis situation. We begin with a review of the literature associated with issues advertising, reputation management, and **image restoration**. The review is then followed by an analysis of the NWA advertisements. Finally, we provide an assessment regarding the role of issues advertising in organizational crises.

#### The Context of Crisis Communication

In their comprehensive review of the crisis communication literature, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) define organizational crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high-priority goals" (p. 233). Coombs (1999) agrees that crises threaten organizations and that they are often characterized by "surprise and unpredictability" (p. 2). In cases such as employee strikes, Coombs contends that the crisis is "unpredictable but not unexpected" (p. 2). Coombs notes further that "wise organizations know crises will befall them; they just do not know when" (p. 2). Both Coombs and Seeger et al. extol the merits of crisis planning.

Ultimately, crises threaten to dissolve an organization's social legitimacy. Seeger et al. (1998) explain that social responsibility is a vital component in crisis communication. These researchers see socially responsible behavior as the key to earning social legitimacy. Similarly, Hearit (1995) posits that "a clear indicator of a social legitimacy crisis is the emergence of public animosity toward the corporation" (p. 8). He also suggests that in crisis situations, "public hostility is a form of social sanction" from the supra system that demands a response (p. 3). Such threats to legitimacy are particularly troubling. Commenting on social systems in general, Boulding (1978) argues that legitimacy is probably the major element in survival. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) suggest that organizations are viewed as legitimate when they "establish congruence between the social values associated with or implied by the activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system of which they are a part" (p. 122).

Seeger (1999) contends that for organizations the process of securing or regaining legitimacy is, in part, rhetorical insofar as organizations must publicly "argue that they are functioning in a manner that is consistent with larger, socially defined norms of appropriate conduct" (p. 104). Massey (2001) agrees, commenting that "legitimacy management is an ongoing process that involves gaining, maintaining, and in some cases regaining legitimacy for the organization" (p. 157). Massey also offers a compelling argument for viewing legitimacy as "an interaction between organizational strategy and stakeholder expectations" (p. 155). As such, he contends that the legitimizing efforts of an organization are best seen as a "dialogic process and not a monologic organizational activity" (p. 155). Massey summarizes the dialogic approach to legitimacy as follows: A dialogic approach to legitimacy management requires ongoing communication between the organization and its stakeholders, not the one-way transmission of information from the organization to stakeholders. It involves strategic communications targeted toward specific organizational audiences, and it encourages participation of organizational stakeholders. It involves understanding that legitimacy is not something that can be claimed by organizations, but is instead something that is given by stakeholders. (pp. 155-156)

Ulmer and Sellnow (2000) explain that the day-to-day communication expectations of stakeholders are "greatly intensified by crisis" (p. 145). These researchers also contend that crises can actually expand the number of relevant stakeholders an organization must address. Thus, crises necessitate extraordinary effort to identify and communicate with all relevant stakeholders. Similarly, Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) offer "emotional, ecological, social, ethical, medical, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, psychological, and existential" criteria as starting points for stakeholder identification (p. 129). Clearly, crises create an intense need for an organization to communicate with an expansive and diverse audience.

Massey (2001) argues that organizations should follow consistent crisis response patterns, suggesting "consistent crisis-response strategies are more effective than inconsistent ones for legitimacy management" (p. 169). Although the evidence is clear that consistent communication enhances the legitimizing dialogue with multiple audiences, achieving such consistency can be difficult. Nakra (2000) contends that organizations must deal effectively with a myriad of audiences to maintain a positive reputation. He also argues that a diverse array of stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, sales staff, recruiters, regulators and stock-holders, constitute the relevant audience an organization must address in

seeking to maintain or improve its **image**. Similarly, Uliner and Seilnow (2000) assert that viability for an organization during a crisis situation depends on its ability to maintain a positive relationship with important stakeholders, including stockholders, workers, consumers, suppliers, creditors, competitors, government agencies and others.

Ice (1991) views the diverse audiences organizations face in crisis situations as a series of publics. He explains that "a public responsibility perspective examines the communication produced by the organization toward publics and discerns the corporation's responsibility to the public from an analysis of that communication" (p. 345). In his analysis of Union Carbide's Rhopal crisis, Ice identified four publics to which Union Carbide had to respond. Enabling publics include regulatory agencies and stockholders. Functional publics include employees and consumers who provided the labor and resources needed by the organization. Normative publics include the industry as a whole. Finally, diffused publics are those unorganized groups whose views might be important to a given organization. These four publics are essential to an organization's attempt to regain legitimacy. For instance, Ice argues that "a corporation communicates different messages to each of its publics because of the different relationship each public has with the organization" (p. 360). Still, Massey (2001) and Seeger (1999) offer convincing evidence that organizations are most effective in regaining social legitimacy when they communicate consistently among their various publics. Achieving such consistency is often a complex process. Ice (1991) contends that "in order to appear consistent, companies often employ the same rhetorical strategies to all publics without strategically considering the impact of such strategies on each public" (p. 360). Schuetz (1990) agrees, noting that organizations in crisis situations must structure a complex case in response to a crisis and direct different elements of the case to different audiences.

Numerous scholars have identified the potential merit of strategic ambiguity as a means for resolving the potential tension between publics and organizations (Eisenberg, 1984; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Sellnow, 1993; Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998; Tyler, 1997; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). Eisenberg explains that organizations often pursue multiple goals and multiple audiences, and that such complexity produces ambiguity as a common and essential element of organizational communication. Tyler sees strategic ambiguity as a viable option to resolve tension that is produced when an organization wishes to apologize to victims of a crisis, but are advised by legal counsel not to do so. She explains that in crisis situations the communication literature recommends candor and openness, whereas the legal literature advocates caution and reticence. Tyler seeks to resolve the conflicting viewpoints by suggesting that strategic ambiguity may be appropriate "in situations in which company executives experience a need to rest ore the company's **image** but are limited in what they can say because they are reluctant to incur legal liability" (p. 67). Sellnow et al. offer support for Tyler's recommendation by providing evidence that organizations can offer corrective action during the early stages of a crisis without accepting legal responsibility for the problem.

Clearly, to be successful in their efforts to regain or maintain social legitimacy, organizations must develop a consistent message that does not alienate relevant publics. We now explore the viability of issues advertising for reaching an organization's multiple audiences.

### Issues Advertising

The reputation management literature offers a tool to more fully appreciate the NWA crisis. In particular, reputation management as applied to the areas of social responsibility and audience is useful for our analysis. Reputation differs conceptually from **image**. According to Weiss, Anderson, and MacInnis, (1999) **image** reflects a set of associations, whereas reputation denotes an overall judgment regarding the extent to which a firm is held in high esteem or regard. Reputation is ultimately the measure of an organization's social responsibility (van Riel, 1997). Caudron (1997) clarifies the potential impact an event such as a strike can have on an organization's reputation, explaining that reputations, both good and bad, are created by every observable action taken by organizations. The risk for an organization in a strike situation is that its reputation will be damaged by claims from an internal stakeholder which are inconsistent with the organization's corporate story (van Riel, 1997). van Riel explains that differentiation serves as the counterpart to coordination as organizations seek to orchestrate their public communication. Ideally, external publics will differentiate internal stakeholders communication from that which is consistent with the organization's point of view.

Issues advertising is one rhetorical means available to organizations that want to publicly establish their position about a controversial issue. Heath (1997) explains that "issues advertising typically results from the desire to defend or promote a socioeconomic point of view" (p. 198). Issues advertisements serve as a channel of communication through which the organization can present its case to the public. Unlike product or **image** advertising, the desired outcome of issues advertising is not to create an **image**.

Instead, issues advertisements are designed to persuade the public to support the same stand on a given issue taken by the organization. Gaining public support for the organization's stand on a controversial issue is a rhetorical means for maintaining a socially legitimate reputation. Yet it should be noted that Sethi (1977) admonishes corporations to focus on informing the public when engaging in issues advertising. He questions the ethics of organizations that produce self-serving ads under the guise of informing the public.

Heath's (1997) comprehensive discussion of issues advertising is particularly fitting to the present case because he frames the discussion in the context of issues management. Heath defines issues management as a means for achieving harmony between an organization's actions and the expectations of its relevant audience. Thus, Heath's work addresses the means by which organizations develop supportive arguments when responding to crisis situations. Heath explains that organizations create a persona through their words and actions, and that personas develop through a circular and ongoing process. Persona is developed by the combination of previous actions taken and the public stance an organization takes on a given current issue. An organization's actions are questioned in a crisis situation. Accordingly, Bostdorff and Vibbert (1994) explicate the merits of value advertising for enhancing an organization's public stature. They identify three functions of values advocacy for organizational communicators: "It can enhance an organization's **image**, it can deflect criticism, and it can establish value premises that can be used in later discourse" (p. 141).

Issues advertising campaigns provide a means for an organization to communicate directly and simultaneously with both internal and external audiences in an attempt to legitimize its stance on a controversial issue. Heath (1997) explains that issues advertisements are most effective when they offer an explanation for how the issue might be related to the self-interests and altruistic concerns of relevant audiences. In other words, an organization seeks to create a persona that is seen as legitimate by important audiences. According to Heath, the organization seeks to create a "rhetorically constructed and publicly recognized congruence" between the values of the organization and those of its relevant environment (p.2). Heath further explains that if an issues advertising campaign is successful, four outcomes will be present: differentiation, association, identity, and goodwill.

Differentiation occurs when the organization creates a unique persona that contrasts with competing organizations. Heath (1997) explains that associations arise from the "attributions that come to mind as a result of the actions, values, and traits that typify the company or industry" (p. 203). Actions and messages that produce differentiation and associations help to establish a unique identity for the organization. This identity is typically manifest as a metaphor for the organizations. For example, Heath notes that an organization may emerge as a "bold advocate" or "technical advisor" on a particular issue. Finally, Heath contends that goodwill is the result of actions taken by the organizations that "advance community interests" (p. 203). In the following section we view Heath's outcomes from the perspective of crisis communication strategies.

### **Image Restoration** Strategies

Ware and Linkugel (1973) introduced a series of strategies for apologetic discourse and applied them to texts of political apologia. Schultz and Seeger (1991) contend that Ware and Linkugel's genre of apologetic discourse may be expanded from its typical focus on single speaker situations and applied to "rhetoric which is corporate rather than individual centered" (p. 51). Several authors have adapted Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work to organizational crisis communication (e.g., Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Ice, 1991; Schultz & Seeger, 1991; Sellnow & Ulmer, 1995). Benoit (1995) offers the most comprehensive and widely applied typology that extends the work of Ware and Linkugel. While Benoit's typology is fitting for both individuals and organizations, his development of **image restoration** strategies for organizational crisis communication is most relevant to our present analysis.

Benoit (1995) identifies five **image restoration** strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Denial may involve simply denying responsibility for an event or shifting the blame from the organization to individuals or agencies outside the boundaries of the organization. Organizations can evade responsibility for a crisis by claiming that they were provoked; lacked sufficient information (defeasibility); had an accident; or that, despite the crisis, they were acting with good intentions. Corporate advocates can reduce the perceived offensiveness of the crisis event with six variants. Three of these variants, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence come from Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work. Bolstering emphasizes the positive qualities and actions of the organization in order to strengthen the audience's positive impression of the organization. Differentiation occurs when the organization distinguishes its actions from similar more o



ffensive actions. Transcendence provides a new perspective for the act in question. To these variants, Benoit adds minimizing the crisis, attacking the accuser, and compensating the victims of the crisis. In taking corrective action, the accused pledges to either return the situation to normal or to make meaningful changes that will prevent similar problems in the future. Mortification occurs when the accused accepts responsibility for its wrongdoing and asks to be forgiven.

Clearly, organizations do not always wait for crises before engaging in issues advertising campaigns. As Fishman (1999) explains, Benoit's (1995) typology offers an "all-encompassing emphasis on maximizing reputation through **image restoration** strategies" (p. 353). Previous research associated with crisis communication has dedicated little time to the identity organizations adopt in their extended issues advertising efforts. However, Heath's (1997) persona-building strategies are reflected in the **image restoration** approaches outlined by Benoit. For example, both Benoit and Heath offer differentiation as a means for diminishing alarm related to an organization or industry's actions. Heath's broad definition of differentiation also encompasses the strategies of denial that are outlined by Benoit. For example, an organization may deny an accusation that is made by its critics or shift the blame for an action to another party in an attempt to portray themselves as being beyond or better than the allegation. Benoit's discussion of good intentions and compensation is also similar to Heath's notion of goodwill. Corrective action and mortification could also be classified as goodwill if such actions are designed to enhance a community or group of stakeholders beyond simply admitting blame and repairing the damage of a crisis. Similarly, Benoit's explanations of bolstering and transcendence fall within the parameters of associations. We believe that for studying an organization's response to crisis situations, Heath's persona-building approaches can be effectively subsumed by Benoit's five general strategies for **image restoration**. In the next section of the paper we use the approach as a means to investigate the crisis circumstances surrounding the 1998 NWA. To better articulate and guide the analysis, two general research questions were posed:

#### Research Questions

1. Were the **image restoration** strategies employed by NWA via issues advertising effective?
2. Can issues advertising serve as the primary channel for an organization's crisis response?

#### Analysis

In this study we focus on the role of issues advertising, or controversy advertising, in an organization's attempt to maintain social legitimacy and profitability. As such, we consider the potential of issues advertising as a channel of crisis communication. Specifically, we focus on the 13 advertisements placed by NWA from July 30, 1998, through September 12, 1998, in section A of the Minneapolis Star Tribune. The Minneapolis Star Tribune was selected because Minneapolis, MN, is a NWA hub city. The Minneapolis Star Tribune's audience is one of NWA's primary passenger markets and was greatly affected by the NWA pilots' strike of 1998. References to news releases provided by NWA and ALPA are also included to provide context for the study.

The NWA pilots' strike is most fitting with Coombs (1999) discussion of crisis events that are expected, but unpredictable. The expectation of a possible strike enabled NWA to begin and extend an issues advertising campaign to defend its position. The NWA pilots' strike was not entirely unexpected. For two years prior to the strike, the company had negotiated with ALPA to develop a new contract for its pilots. In the second year of negotiations, ALPA asked the National Mediation Board (NMB) to arbitrate. When no agreement was reached by May of 1998, NWA pilots voted 99.02 percent in favor of a strike. A 30-day cooling-off period, declared by the NMB, produced no resolution. Despite this impasse, NWA officials believed they could avoid a strike. NWA officials lobbied hard to have President Clinton form an emergency board to avert or postpone the strike as he had done a year earlier, moments after American Airline pilots went on strike (Carey, 1998b). To the surprise of NWA officials, these appeals failed and the strike commenced on August 28, 1998. The strike immediately created public frustration toward and financial jeopardy for NWA. NWA could not function without its pilots, and an interruption in service was predicted to cost NWA \$25 million per day (Carey, 1998b). Thus, the strike threatened NWA's reputation of reliability and, ultimately, its financial stability. NWA's reputation was threatened on two fronts. First, a segment of its employees claimed publicly that they were treated unfairly. Second, the company was forced to leave thousands of customers grounded and frustrated as the strike began. Without its pilots, the company lacked the means necessary to respond to the complaints of customers whose flights were canceled.

We now offer a chronological interpretation of the **image restoration** strategies NWA used in 13 issues advertisements related to the strike. The 13 ads included in the analysis represent the various strategies,

both visually and rhetorically, used by NWA in its issues advertising campaign.

Ad 1: July 21, 1998

NWA's first ad appeared one day after the National Mediation Board called for a 30-day cooling-off period. Visually, NWA established a layout in its first ad that it used repeatedly during the strike. NWA directly addressed customers at the top of the ad with a bold headline reading, "What does the recent impasse in the Northwest Airlines pilots' negotiations mean to you?" Below the headline were two small paragraphs in bold italicized text. The paragraphs offered an introduction to 14 bolded subheadings that reflected consumer questions. No graphics appeared in the ad.

**Corrective Action.** The primary thrust of the first ad was to minimize the fears NWA's customers had about their scheduled travel on the airline. At this point in the negotiations, NWA's leadership remained confident that a strike could be averted. NWA insisted that despite the pilots' threats a negotiated settlement would be reached soon:

Northwest is committed to reaching an agreement with the pilots' union without the pain of a strike. We believe that a negotiated settlement remains possible and we will do our utmost to achieve such a settlement. There is no reason why the two parties, negotiating in good faith, cannot reach an agreement in the next 30 days.

The remainder of the ad clarified this pledge by NWA.

**Compensation.** Although NWA insisted that its negotiating efforts would resolve the pilots' frustrations, the company pledged that a plan was in place to compensate passengers in the unlikely event of a strike. The company claimed, "should a strike occur, we will make every effort to accommodate you on another carrier at no additional charge to you."

Ad 2: August 14, 1998

NWA's second ad was a response to one placed by ALPA a day earlier. ALPA's ad included a graphic that symbolized NWA as a businessman wearing an advertising board that read, "Please help, only four years of record profits." ALPA's ad insisted that the pilots had not been fairly compensated for the concessions they had accepted four years earlier.

NWA's response posed a sharp contrast to ALPA's claims. Visually, the ad featured an NWA jet flying. Under the photo read the headline, "It's time to talk about what's fair." The ad established a point of simple denial while also offering strategies designed to shift the blame to the pilots and an explanation of provocation.

**Simple Denial.** The pilots consistently claimed that NWA had unfairly hoarded profits and failed to compensate them for previous concessions. In 1993 the pilots union agreed to pay concessions in exchange for company stock and board seats. The concessions were needed to help NWA avoid bankruptcy (Rose, 1993). NWA directly countered the pilots' argument by claiming the company was generous and fair; not greedy and unfair as the pilots claimed. In this manner NWA simply denied the pilots' accusation that they had not received adequate compensation. Moreover, NWA denied the pilots' claim that its current offer was not competitive with industry standards. NWA claimed it had "offered to pay Northwest pilots the same as those who work for American, Delta and United--airlines that are twice our size and make billions more.

**Shifting the Blame.** NWA clearly moved the blame for the stalled negotiations to the pilots with the following claim:

We don't think it's fair, though, that the pilot-union negotiators flatly refused our proposals and are instead demanding an industry-leading contract, with hundreds of millions more in pay and benefit demands. The pilot negotiators have also rejected our offer twice--to let an independent, third party arbitrate the differences.

With such evidence, NWA insisted the pilots were blocking the company's attempts to provide a reasonable strategy for correcting the situation.

**Provocation.** NWA claimed that the pilots provoked the company into initiating its issues advertising campaign. NWA wrote, "Negotiations should not take place in public; so while we felt obliged to respond to our pilots' recent ads, our focus remains on good-faith negotiations that are scheduled to resume on August 17." NWA further stated, "We're anxious to resolve our differences; we hope our pilots are, too."

### Ad 3: August 21, 1998

NWA's third ad ran a week before the strike began. The ad continued to challenge the pilots' repeated claim that NWA was unfair. NWA extended its claim of simple denial and continued the strategy of shifting blame. The ad also included some bolstering. Visually, the ad established NWA's position on key issues using the same format as in ad 1.

**Simple Denial.** NWA supported the strategy of denying the pilots' claim that the company had been unfair in its compensation by offering the following details to the public:

In 1993, everyone at Northwest Airlines came together and agreed to take pay cuts in order to turn the airline around. As part of that agreement, our pilots received over 14 million shares of stock. That pilots stock is now worth approximately \$519 million, or about 60% MORE than their concessions.

This direct contrast in the interpretation of how the pilots had been compensated continued throughout the ad campaign.

**Shifting Blame.** NWA continued to emphasize that it had repeatedly offered to "submit all open issues to a neutral party" and that "the National Mediation Board also proposed arbitration." NWA insisted that the pilots had rejected each of these offers. The ad offered this interpretation of ALPA's motives: "To get what it wants, the pilots' union is organizing for a strike on August 29 that will paralyze much of the country."

**Bolstering.** NWA continued to bolster itself with claims that at all points in the conflict the company had made its customers a top priority. For example, NWA wrote: "We know that you don't want a strike. Neither does Northwest Airlines. We are committed to being fair and to good-faith bargaining based on fact."

### Ad 4: August 21, 1998

NWA's fourth ad ran simultaneously with ad 3. Unlike ad 3, however, ad 4 reintroduced NWA's pledge of corrective action should a strike occur. Visually, the ad format was the same as NWA used in ad 1.

**Corrective Action.** Although NWA insisted "there is no reason why the two parties, negotiating in good faith, cannot reach an agreement before the strike deadline," the company insisted that it was prepared to cope with the turmoil of a strike. NWA told customers that it was "committed to providing you with the most up-to-date travel information available so that you can make informed decisions."

### Ad 5: August 25, 1998

NWA's fifth ad appeared three days before the strike. The ad focused on differentiating the pilots' claim that they had not been fairly compensated by emphasizing the value of the stock NWA had already given to its pilots. The ad also insisted that pilots' compensation was competitive with industry-wide standards. Visually, the ad featured the value of the stock given to pilots in headline form. The body of the ad included a picture of a NWA pilot's hat. At the bill of the pilot's hat was a headline that read, "The pilots have shared in the airlines' success."

**Transcendence.** In addition to the hat graphic and headline that insisted NWA's stock compensation had more than fulfilled its obligation to the pilots, NWA initiated a form of transcendence in the ad. NWA insisted that its resistance to higher compensation was based on the larger issue of remaining competitive rather than management's greed. NWA wrote, "We want our pilots and all of our employees to continue to share in the success they helped build. But we must remain competitive to ensure that success."

### Ad 6: August 26

On August 26, 1998, NWA's optimism appeared to be wavering as it announced cancellation 170 of 1700 flights for August 28-29, 1998. In a news release, NWA stated, "This allows an orderly shutdown of the airline in the event of a strike, and will enable Northwest to efficiently restart its operations if a settlement is reached" (NWA, 1998a, par.1). Ad 6 supports this assumption. The ad focused on simple denial and shifting blame.

**Simple Denial.** NWA used the visual design of ad 6 to extend denial related to the pilots' claims of inadequate compensation. Visually, ad 6 resembled ad 5. A chart showing that the stock NWA had given

pilots in 1993 had increased in value 65% replaced the picture of a pilots' hat. The bold headlines of the ad stated that NWA had offered to pay its top pilots \$240,000 per year for 14 days of work per month.

**Shifting Blame.** To shift blame for the strike to the pilots, NWA offered a stark summary of its negotiation efforts:

In the past 23 months, we have held nearly 200 negotiating sessions with our pilots' union representative. We have met day and night, in cities across the country, and have reached an agreement on 26 of 31 contract sessions. But the union negotiators continue to turn a deaf ear to every reasonable proposal on one issue: pay.

The statement implied that ALPA negotiators were simply unreasonable.

Ad 7: August 27, 1998

A day before the strike, NWA's seventh ad introduced a new visual format. The ad's dominant visual was a clipboard that held a five-question, multiple-choice test entitled: "The Northwest Airlines Pilots' Quiz." The ad served as simple denial of the pilots' claim that they were not compensated adequately. The ad also introduced an attack on the pilots.

**Simple Denial.** Rather than deliberate about how the pilots and NWA interpreted the past concessions and compensation, NWA's seventh ad bluntly emphasized what it believed was a generous offer. The quiz offered three answer choices for each question. The final choice clearly the most damning for the pilot was marked as 'correct' in each case. The first question asked what the pilots' compensation did between 1993 and 1998. Possible answers were "decreased," "stayed flat," and "went up 37%, or 6.5% per year." The second question asked for the value of the stock given to NWA pilots as compensation for their concessions. Possible answers were "\$100 million," "\$320 million," and "\$510 million--almost 60% more than the concessions." The third question asked what the average pilots' salary would be under NWA's current proposal. Possible answers were "\$50,000 for 20 days of work per month," "\$100,000 for 24 days of work per month," and "\$150,000 for 14 days of work per month." The fourth question asked how NWA's salary proposal compared with the pay given to pilots at American, Delta, and United. Possible answers were "half their salary," "3/4 of their salary," and "the same salary."

**Attack Accuser.** The final question on the quiz asked how much money the first 10 days of the strike would cost the nation's economy. Possible answers were "\$50 million," "100 million," or "over \$740 million." With the final question, NWA implied that pilots were responsible for unnecessarily damaging the nation's economy. With this ad, NWA used a vivid representation to attack the pilots for what NWA saw as a disregard for the nation's economy.

Ad 8: August 28, 1998

With a strike looming, NWA placed an ad composed primarily of an enlarged copy of a letter written by John H. Dasburg, C.E.O of NWA. In the letter, Dasburg said he was offering a promise and an apology. The promise reflected corrective action, and the apology took the form of mortification.

**Corrective Action.** Dasburg promised to negotiate with a sense of urgency, saying that "First we promise you--our customer--our very best efforts in this difficult time. We will take this promise to the negotiating table today and we will remain at the table for as long as the possibility of a solution exists." In this manner, Dasburg insisted that the needs of NWA's customers were not forgotten in the prolonged negotiating process.

**Mortification.** Although NWA consistently shifted blame for the strike to the pilots' union, Dasburg offered an apology to customers, stating that "Finally, we offer you an apology. We regret that the contract negotiations with pilot union negotiators have become a source of unwelcome disruption of your important travel plans and anxiety in your life. Please accept our profound apologies." Using mortification along with shifting blame may appear somewhat incongruous. However, the apology is far less contradictory when one considers that Dasburg is actually apologizing for the failed negotiations. Thus, when viewed in the context of NWA's previous ads, Dasburg's apology is on behalf of the pilots.

Ad 9: August 29, 1998

As the strike began NWA placed an ad that summarized the anticipated impact of the event. The ad featured a picture of stranded passengers with a headline that read, "A Northwest Airlines pilots' strike will strand 25,000 Minnesota travelers. And that's just a start." Specifically, the ad used transcendence in



a manner that enabled NWA to bolster its position while attacking the pilots.

Transcendence. NWA emphasized its understanding of the most important consideration of the strike—the well being of customers. NWA explained that "Business activities, vital shipping, medical trips, weddings, funerals, vacations ... all could come to a halt."

Bolstering. The empathy shown in NWA's use of transcendence also had a bolstering effect. NWA insisted that it was behaving "reasonably" because it did not want to see its customers suffer.

Attack Accuser. Conversely, NWA's message of transcendence implied that the pilots were not sensitive to greater needs of NWA's passengers. The attack was explicit in the final line in the body of the ad, "It makes you wonder what the pilots' union really wants: a reasonable agreement or a strike."

Ad 10: August 30, 1998

On the second day of the strike, NWA placed an ad with the headline "Our Offer: Their Response." The ad was visually designed so that NWA could offer a clear comparison between NWA's offer and ALPA's response. Clearly, the comparison was proposed to redirect any perceived offensiveness for the strike away from NWA and toward ALPA. Thus, simple denial and shifting blame were the primary strategies in ad 10.

Simple Denial. The ad featured a summary of the NWA offer on the left with a response from ALPA on the right. Under the offer heading, NWA insisted that it had proposed a substantial pay increase, profit sharing, a lump sum retroactive payment for every pilot, job protection, a no-layoff guarantee, and an improved pension. Under the response heading, nothing but the word "no" was listed for each offer made by NWA. In this manner, NWA fortified a consistent claim that it had been generous rather than selfish throughout the negotiation process.

Shifting Blame. NWA's portrayal of its extensive and complex offer having been received by the pilots with nothing other than a simple "no" implied that ALPA's negotiators were not serious in their negotiation efforts. The position was advanced further in the ad with the closing question, "It makes us wonder: who are they negotiating for?"

Ad 11: September 1, 1998

As September began NWA and ALPA were no longer negotiating. The ad featured two boxes: one black with white print and the other white with black print. The dark box contained ALPA's demand. The white box contained NWA's interpretation of the motives surrounding the strike. In such a manner, NWA advanced its attack on the pilots by claiming that they had an ulterior reason for their unwillingness to accept NWA's offer. NWA also offered bolstering evidence in the ad.

Attack Accuser. In the black box, under the heading of "demand," NWA quoted ALPA's vice chairman as having asked for a contract that will "set the standard for pilot contracts in the United States and, at the same time, influence pilot contracts throughout the world." In the box labeled reality, NWA included a quotation from an industry analyst that had been published in the New York Times two days earlier. The quotation read, "The pilots' demands are difficult for the airline to meet. Northwest is not a big enough carrier to set precedents." In the body of the ad, NWA stated, "It's time to get a contract for Northwest pilots, not the industry." In this way NWA established the claim that ALPA was concerned about industry-wide pay scales rather than NWA's passengers.

Bolstering. The introduction of an independent industry analyst's remarks from the New York Times also served to bolster NWA's credibility in its claim to have been honest in its negotiations.

Ad 12: September 2, 1998

In ad 12, NWA offered compensation to its WorldPerks members. The ad included a headline that read: "Northwest Airlines WorLdPerks members deserve credit for being the best customers in the world" and a coupon for its members.

Compensation. The coupon invited WorldPerks members to clip the ad and send it to NWA to receive mileage credit for rerouted travel. NWA also pledged to compensate WorldPerks customers by extending expiration dates on accumulated mileage and by crediting them with new mileage accrued on re-booked flights.

Ad 13: September 3, 1998

On September 3 NWA placed its final original ad. The ad differed from the twelve discussed previously in that it summarized the many points of agreement between NWA and ALPA. The goal was to emphasize the fact that the pilots were striking for one reason and one reason only—pay increases. Visually, the ad featured two columns. On the left, NWA listed all of the points of agreement. On the right, NWA listed the pay increases and benefits ALPA had rejected. NWA used this evidence to extend the claim of simple denial established in ad 12.

**Attack Accuser.** The ad claimed that NWA and ALPA had reached resolution in such areas as job security, vacation, career advancement, flight instructors, no "dual qualification," crew augmentation, temporary positions, and other issues. In contrast, NWA summarized its offers of pay increases, retroactive pay, pay scale adjustments, per diem increases, and profit sharing in the right column under the heading "rejected." NWA used this evidence to support the following argument written at the bottom of the ad: "But the pilots' union, as it for two years, to move on their demand for an industry-leading contract. A demand that leading financial analysts say is unrealistic and detrimental to the airline's future." Again, NWA insisted that ALPA was negotiating for the industry, not the airline.

In summary, the NWA issues advertising campaign surrounding the pilots' strike introduced arguments fitting with all five of Benoit's (1995) general categories. Specifically, NWA denied ALPA's claims with both simple denial and shifting blame. NWA evaded responsibility for making the negotiation process public with a claim of provocation. NWA used bolstering, transcendence, attack accuser, and compensation in an effort to minimize its part in the failed negotiations. NWA featured its commitment to negotiating as corrective action. Finally, at the outset of the strike, NWA offered a message of mortification through a letter written by NWA's C.E.O. With these arguments NWA sought to establish its position as more accurate and just than that of ALPA.

#### Termination of the Strike

On September 3, the Wall Street Journal reported the presence of federal mediators in the negotiations between NWA and ALPA. President Clinton was reported to have been concerned about the duration of the strike (Carey, 1998c, p. A4). On September 10, NWA conceded to ALPA's demands, and a proposed settlement was reached between NWA and ALPA. The pilots' union members ratified the settlement on September 12. An ALPA news release offered this response:

Now, we're ready to return to work and are looking forward to being back in the cockpit instead of on the picket lines. However I want to remind Northwest management that there are five other unions at Northwest, and the job isn't done until all of us have new contracts. (ALPA, 1998b, p. 1)

According to the news release the contract included "significant job protections," a "12 percent pay increase," and the "elimination of the two-tiered pay system known as the B-scale" (p. 2). NWA also commented on the agreement that ended the strike. A NWA news release stated:

Northwest Airlines is very pleased that we will be back in the air soon and providing our customers with the quality of air transportation they expect and deserve. We fully realize that this has been a difficult time for all Northwest people, our customers and the communities, states and countries we serve. We are anxious to return to the business of flying and serving our passengers and cargo customers around the world. (NWA, 1998b, par. 1)

Although the agreement was signed on September 12, Northwest was forced to cancel flights through September 15. NWA called back its work force on September 14. Due to the number of no-work notices issued, NWA was not able to launch flights until September 16. It was not until September 21 that NWA returned to full service. In the end, the financial losses sustained by NWA were greater than was expected. The Wall Street Journal reported that the strike contributed to third quarter losses for NWA of \$223 million (Carey & McCartney, 1998).

#### Assessment

##### NWA's Effectiveness

The first research question asked if the **image restoration** strategies employed by NWA through issues advertising were effective. Analysis of more obvious signs of success and failure suggest that NWA's issues advertising campaign was ineffective. The company eventually conceded on nearly all of ALPA's demands; lost more than \$200 million; and, due to the increased wages paid to pilots and other personnel, has still not returned to the profit levels it enjoyed prior to the strike. Yet, NWA did manage to

maintain and then expanded its client base. Nevertheless, we conclude that NWA's issues advertising campaign did not fully produce the results the company had hoped to see. That said, however, portions of the campaign were successful in reaching some of NWA's audiences. In the following section we discuss the success of the campaign.

**Table 1.**  
**Utilization of Image Restoration Strategies per NWA Advertisement**  
**Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Categories**

	Denial	Evolving Responsibility	Reducing Offensiveness	Compensation	Corrective Action	Mortification
Ad 1					Corrective Action	
Ad 2	Simple Denial Shifting the Blame	Provocation			Corrective Action	
Ad 3	Simple Denial Shifting the Blame		Bolstering		Corrective Action	
Ad 4				Transcendence		
Ad 5					Corrective Action	
Ad 6	Simple Denial Shifting the Blame				Corrective Action	
Ad 7	Simple Denial		Attack Accuser		Corrective Action	Mortification
Ad 8				Transcendence		
Ad 9					Corrective Action	
Ad 10	Simple Denial Shifting the Blame				Corrective Action	
Ad 11			Attack Accuser Bolstering			
Ad 12			Compensation			
Ad 13			Attack Accuser			

NWA addressed at least four key audiences in its **image restoration** strategies during the strike: consumers, non-pilot employees, investors, and the pilots union. The ads placed by NWA attempted to foster a positive relationship with all of these audiences. Initially, the ads enabled NWA to establish its position and to support its claims without relying solely on media coverage. Well before the strike began NWA sought to initiate its claim that the pilots were adequately compensated for their concessions and that their pay level was competitive with industry standards. A high-ranking public relations official within NWA at the time of the strike indicated "management felt these ads were the best way to get out the message and they felt the negotiations were in good faith and that they had presented a good contract" (personal communication). As the table indicates, NWA used eight different **image restoration** strategies in the ads it placed prior to the strike. Simple denial and corrective action were at the center of the pre-strike campaign. By using these arguments, NWA management was able to inform its multiple audiences about what it considered to be the key issues of the company's debate with pilots. NWA was successful insofar as the ads provided information on the debate from the company's perspective. Moreover, the ads were clearly designed to move beyond information to the level of persuasion. Specifically, NWA hoped to turn the sentiment of stakeholders against the pilots' union, thus pressuring the pilots to accept the proposed contract.

NWA was confident that public opinion would sway toward NWA's management and "a contract would be met at the deadline" (personal communication). NWA's pre-strike advertisements also sought to maintain the confidence and support of passengers, to reassure investors that NWA was negotiating effectively, and to clearly establish its position regarding previous concessions with its other employee unions. Prior to the strike, the advertisements provided NWA with a highly visible means of communicating with its multiple audiences. However, NWA did not expect the pilots to actually strike (personal communication). When the strike occurred, NWA's advertisements failed to generate public criticism of the pilots,

contradicted its claim that a settlement was the company's top priority, and did little to suggest to other employee unions that previous concessions were adequate. This concern, coupled with the fact that NWA eventually conceded on every major issue, indicates that although the ads provided an effective means of informing its audiences, they failed to project the persuasive appeal NWA hoped to create. To be sure, the fact that NWA was at odds with an internal audience clearly contributed to this failure. As one high-ranking public relations official at NWA said of the issues advertising campaign, "We lost in the battle for public opinion. Some people said, 'you're right--pilots are well-paid.' Others said--'don't bother us with dirty laundry, just get it done'" (personal communication).

The long-term data available regarding NWA's profits and volume of paying passengers, however, identify a key distinction between NWA's effectiveness with two essential audiences. Specifically, the data provided by NWA (2000) indicate that the strike had far less impact on passengers than it had on investors. In the year prior to the strike, NWA served 54.7 million paying passengers. The 1998 strike negatively affected passenger numbers for NWA: The total passengers served for the year dipped to 50.5 million. Yet the setback was only temporary. By the close of 1999, NWA had served a record number of revenue generating passengers--56.1 million. The trend continued in 2000 when NWA recorded another record year, serving 58.7 million paying fliers. Clearly, the strike did not result in lasting passenger frustration and avoidance. It would appear that NWA's decision to emphasize compensation for passengers in its ads both before and during the strike was prudent.

Conversely, the data from MarketWatch.com (2001) point out that the strike had a profoundly negative impact on NWA's stock value. In the year prior to the strike, NWA's stock hovered around \$40.00 per share. During the first few months of 1998, the stock value climbed to a peak of approximately \$65.00 per share. Four months prior to the strike, the stock price declined precipitously and trading volume nearly doubled, indicating that investors were selling off their shares. Two months after the start of the strike the stock bottomed out at just under \$20.00 per share. Since that time and continuing to this day, the stock has hovered around \$25.00 per share. In short, NWA's passenger volume has risen steadily since the strike while its stock value remains far lower than pre-strike levels.

The passenger volume and stock values measures offer evidence that, on the one hand, NWA's reputation suffered seriously among investors. Yet on the other hand, NWA's passenger volume continues to rise. Although there is a host of confounding variables that influence both stock prices and passenger volume, the marked distinction between reactions of the two audiences suggests that NWA's efforts to maintain and restore its **image** were not consistently effective. Moreover, it appears that NWA's efforts to sway public opinion achieved mixed results. It would appear that although NWA continued to attract passengers, the company's messages failed to create a surge of public sentiment against the pilots.

Previous research regarding **image restoration** strategies offer additional insights and explanations for why NWA's advertisements were less effective than the company had intended. First, NWA's corrective action was inherently limited. NWA offered its commitment to fair negotiations as a "plan to solve" the problem (Benoit, 1997, p.179). Yet, NWA's inability to reach consensus with ALPA was, in essence, the source of the problem. Thus, NWA was actually proposing what Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) describe as "pseudo-corrective action" (p.51). No improvements in NWA's negotiating process were announced in its issues advertisements. Rather, NWA continually sought to convince the public that the stand it had taken before the strike was justified. Without any change in strategy, the continued invitations for negotiations with pilots offered little evidence that NWA was working to correct the problem. Benoit and Czerwinski explain, "Corrective action should correct the problems, not merely try to change public attitudes" (p. 52). NWA's strategy of holding to its original bargaining position throughout the strike diminished the potential persuasiveness of its corrective action. Thus, NWA offered investors little evidence that it was capable of resolving its labor disputes in an expedient and profitable manner.

Second, NWA's advertisements contained a good deal of denial. Yet, in ad 8 NWA offered the public an apology for the strike. Typically, including denial and mortification in the same sequence of messages is not advisable. In this case, however, NWA was able to apologize for the pilots' actions without accepting blame. Through a combination of simple denial, shifting blame, and mortification, NWA engaged in what Brinson and Benoit (1999) call separation. Separation is necessary if an organization hopes to place blame for a crisis on internal stakeholders. Brinson and Benoit explain that there are three conditions for the successful use of separation, suggesting that "the organization should show that the offensive action violated company policy, the scapegoats must be physically and symbolically separated from the organization, and corrective action must be instituted to prevent future violations of company policy" (p. 507). It could be argued that by going on strike the pilots violated NWA policy. Yet it is not clear that NWA met any of the other conditions outlined by Brinson and Benoit. NWA shifted blame to an essential part of

its organization. It could not exist without its pilots, nor could it replace all of them. Moreover, NWA offered no form of corrective action that suggested future strikes would not occur. In fact, ALPA publicly exclaimed at the end of the strike that the "job isn't done" because there were still five other unions at NWA needing new contracts (ALPA, 1998b, p. 1). Accordingly, NWA's attempt at separation failed.

Third, NWA's issues advertising campaign offered a clear contrast between its view of previous compensation and the pilots' accusations. Specifically, NWA claimed it had been fair and that it was concerned with remaining competitive in the industry. In contrast the pilots accused NWA of acting unfairly and being interested in hoarding profits. NWA used a blend of provocation, transcendence, and bolstering to portray itself as a victim in the negotiating process. Although the approach seems strategically appropriate, the context surrounding the crisis suggests otherwise. Because they were dealing with an internal stakeholder, NWA's previous negotiations with the pilots had a direct bearing on the public's interpretation of the negotiations.

Facing bankruptcy in 1993, NWA received unprecedented financial aid from Minnesota and wage concessions over three years from all of its unions-including ALPA. The concessions by labor, loan payment deferments and public stock offerings assisted NWA in posting a \$10.5 million profit in the third quarter of 1993 (Carey, 1994). NWA also posted record profits in 1994 and 1995. By 1996, employee compensation had been restored to pre-concession stabs. However, the pilots were concerned that their wages had not kept pace with the industry or with NWA's renewed profitability. Consequently, ALPA began negotiating a new contract with NWA in the summer of 1996. Nonetheless, NWA boasted of higher than expected earnings prior to the 1998 strike (Carey, 1998a). Perceived by some as an underdog because they had overcome the prospect of bankruptcy at the beginning of the decade, by 1998 NWA had enjoyed four consecutive years of economic success. Reacting to NWA's success, pilots and other unions claimed they had not yet received their fair share of the financial prosperity. An ALPA news release from May 27, 1998 made the position clear: "When Northwest was faced with bankruptcy, we stood up with our fellow employees in investing nearly \$1 billion of our paychecks to keep this airline alive. Management seems to have forgotten this, but its clear Northwest pilots have not" (ALPA, 1998a, par. 1). In this manner NWA's attempt to feature itself as having already compensated the pilots sufficiently was questioned by its pilots' claims that they had compromised during NWA's lean period and were now waiting to benefit from the company's recent prosperity. NWA's consistent financial success and past concessions of the pilots worked against NWA's claim that it had been fair and that its ability to compete with other airlines was threatened.

The contextual constraints experienced by NWA support the claim that all aspects of an organization's reputation, including actions taken well before the crisis, influence the persuasiveness of crisis communication messages. Coombs and Holladay (2000) characterize this phenomenon as relationship history. They explain that the public's previous knowledge of an organization has a significant impact on how the audience perceives crisis communication messages. Specifically, the relationship history between an organization and its relevant publics is vital to the success of crisis management. Furthermore, Coombs and Holladay argue that relational history has a meaningful influence on the degree to which an audience holds an organization responsible for a crisis. Thus, there is compelling evidence that as an organization initiates an issues advertising campaign it should be mindful of previous actions and of the context surrounding the crisis. Further, our analysis suggests that when an organization addresses an internal stakeholder the context of the crisis is focused even more sharply on previous relationships with its employees.

#### Issues Advertising as Crisis Communication

The second research question considered the extent to which issues advertising can serve as the primary channel for an organization's crisis response. Our analysis of the NWA case permits speculation about the potential role of issues advertising in similar cases. Examination of the NWA case suggests that issues advertising may be an effective approach to take for other companies facing similar crises. First, NWA's issues advertising campaign employed four of the six strategies described by Benoit (1995) for reducing offensiveness. The strike was, in Coombs (1999) terms, "unpredictable, but not unexpected" (p. 2). The impasse in negotiations prior to the strike gave NWA time to develop and implement its issues advertising campaign before the first flight was cancelled. Thus, NWA used issues advertising proactively in an effort to reduce offensiveness for both the strike and the consternation caused for travelers who anticipated that a strike would hamper their travel plans. Clearly, Benoit's typology can serve as a resource for companies that engage in issues advertising during crisis situations. For instance, the organization might review relevant strategies, then select and enact those that fit their specific needs and circumstances.



Second, the NWA case suggests that when developing crisis management plans organizations could prepare in advance the use of issues advertising as one channel of communication. Such planning might include identifying the sources of advertising that are most relevant to the organization's audiences and then determining how and when the ads would be developed. Furthermore, organizations can establish a consistent issues advertising campaign by contemplating how they will position themselves during various types of crises. Management planning in organizations must consider whether the cost of issues advertising is outweighed by the benefits of controlling the content presented to the public. In crisis situations press releases issued by the organizations are likely to yield some no cost media coverage. However, organizations have no direct control over which portions of a news release will be reported to the public. To overcome this potential problem organizations can use issues advertising as one means of controlling the information relevant publics receive. Thus, issues advertising is a proactive means by which organizations can initiate communication with stakeholders.

Third, despite the limited success of NWA's issues advertising campaign, our analysis suggests that this form of advertising can fulfill the vital function of providing information from the organization's perspective during a crisis. Because NWA had ceased operations, NWA issues advertising campaign became a primary means for keeping important publics, such as consumers, investors, and non-pilot employees abreast of strike issues and the company's position. Other organizations could make similar use of an issues advertising campaign to inform their multiple audiences during crisis situations.

### Conclusion

This study offers further evidence that in crisis situations not even the most articulate crisis response is likely to overcome the relational history an audience shares with an organization. Audiences are likely to reject organizational messages during a crisis situation that are inconsistent with past actions. An organization with past failings cannot simply reframe the past to fit with its current objectives. Rather, organizations should be mindful of their reputation in their crisis communication and in their crisis management planning. Our examination of the NWA case offers compelling evidence that effective crisis management is an ongoing process that begins well before the onset of a particular problem. As with any case study our analysis fosters additional questions to consider. First, this study focused on the written content of NWA's advertisements. Future studies should emphasize the visual dimensions of issues advertising. The nonverbal aspects of issues advertising may have a meaningful influence on the audience. Second, space limitations of the study precluded a detailed focus on the organization's opposition. Future issues advertising research might focus more sharply on the efforts of opposition groups. Third, case studies involving issues other than strikes might further illustrate the utility and effectiveness of issues advertising in crisis communication.

Emphasizing the merits of a given product is now only a portion of what organizations seek to accomplish with advertising campaigns. Not surprising, organizations also use advertising in crisis situations. As organizations seek to influence policy and to build or rebuild their images, advertising enables them to share their messages directly with the public. No doubt crisis advertising will continue to evolve as new technologies emerge and as consumer behavior changes. Understanding the influence of crisis advertising remains an essential obligation for those who study business communication.

Table 1

Utilization of Image Restoration Strategies per NWA Advertisement  
Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Categories

	Denial	Evading Responsibility	Reducing Offensiveness
Ad 1			Compensation
Ad 2	Simple Denial	Provocation	
Ad 3	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 4	Simple Denial		Bolstering
Ad 5	Shifting the Blame		Transcendence
Ad 6	Simple Denial		
Ad 7	Shifting the Blame		Attack Accuser
Ad 8	Simple Denial		
Ad 9			Transcendence
Ad 10	Simple Denial		

	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 11		Attack Accuser	
		Bolstering	
Ad 12		Compensation	
Ad 13		Attack Accuser	
	Denial	Corrective Action	Mortification
Ad 1		Corrective Action	
Ad 2	Simple Denial		
	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 3	Simple Denial		
	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 4		Corrective Action	
Ad 5			
Ad 6	Simple Denial		
	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 7	Simple Denial		
Ad 8		Corrective Action	Mortification
Ad 9			
Ad 10	Simple Denial		
	Shifting the Blame		
Ad 11			
Ad 12			
Ad 13			

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