

2009

## Forever New Orleans?: a look back and beyond

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FOREVER NEW ORLEANS?: A LOOK BACK AND BEYOND

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

by  
Blair Alexis Broussard  
B.A., University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2007  
May, 2009

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would have been impossible without the help of many people. First, I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Jinx Broussard, Dr. Danny Shipka and Dr. Nicole Dahmen, for their support and dedication to this project. Your constant encouragement and belief in my abilities helped me tremendously throughout this process.

I would also like to thank Amy Martin and Emily Schult for their comforting advice and help when I needed it the most. Even from hundreds of miles away, the continued support and encouragement helped me through my two years in this program.

To members of the University of Louisiana System staff, thank you for becoming my personal editors and formatting gurus, taking time out of your busy days to read over the many, many pages of this project. I would also like to thank you for lending your ears when I needed someone to listen. Your dedication to the higher education system has been an inspiration to me.

Throughout this journey, I have made amazing friends who provided me with memories and friendships that will last a lifetime. To my “Lafayette friends,” “Baton Rouge friends” and “school friends” thanks for all the laughter, love, and fun that you provided, especially when I needed it the most.

Finally, a very large thank you to my parents, Ricky and Julie Broussard. Without your love and support, none of this would have been possible. Everything that I have ever accomplished has been because of your unyielding faith in me.

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## ABSTRACT

Natural disasters such as hurricanes can be cataclysmic for any city. This is especially true for cities that rely on tourism as an economic driving force. The inevitability of these disasters, even with extensive planning, contain variables for which cities cannot be prepared. Such was the case with Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans in 2005. After the hurricane made landfall on August 29, 2005, New Orleans, the state of Louisiana and federal government officials faced a daunting task of recovering from the terrible natural catastrophe.

Tourism was one of the hardest hit industries for New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. Revenue from out-of-state visitors accounts for 35 percent of the city's annual operating budget, employing 85,000 residents and generates \$5 billion in spending annually (Fact Sheet, NOCVB, 2008). Katrina struck a devastating blow to the second largest industry in the state through physical destruction. In addition, large amounts of negative media coverage contributed to the negative perception that New Orleans could not handle such a disaster.

Public relations seemed a key component to rebuilding New Orleans' image and bringing tourism dollars back to the region. Practitioners, especially those within the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB), stated that they used public relations strategies and tactics to help revive the industry. This study gives a brief historical description of Hurricane Katrina and the tourism industry in New Orleans. It analyzes the approach the NOCVB used to revitalize tourism through the *Forever New Orleans* campaign. This study further supports the importance of practitioners becoming aware of the contingencies that can occur in a time of crisis, and extrapolates results from the analysis of this campaign that can serve as a model for other major cities that face a crisis within the tourism industry after a natural disaster.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina, a Category 3 storm, hit the southern Gulf Coast and the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. It caused extensive damage to the city's infrastructure and image. Prior to the storm, New Orleans was known for its unique culture and southern hospitality. Tourists flocked to the area to experience the *joie de vivre* that New Orleans has to offer. Although many heroic stories about the events occurring in the aftermath of Katrina are waiting to be written, this study is one that concerns the strategies and tactics used to revive the city's tourism industry. According to the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOCVB) public relations was at the heart of the rebirth of this city's tourism industry.

This study begins with a brief historical description of Hurricane Katrina and the tourism industry in New Orleans. It analyzes the strategies and tactics the NOCVB used to revitalize tourism through the *Forever New Orleans* campaign. In-depth interviews with NOCVB employees provide internal insight on the tourism industry's recovery via this campaign. A textual analysis is employed in order to gain an external insight on the tourism industry's recovery. Interviews also provide insight on obstacles the campaign faced, and how these obstacles affected the overall implementation and success of the campaign. The findings from interviews will add to the body of research concerning the extent to which practitioners should employ the contingency theory in public relations campaigns.

This study further supports the importance of practitioners becoming aware of the unpredictable challenges and events that can occur in a time of crisis. These contingencies ultimately decrease the type of accommodation strategies and tactics used during a campaign, which may affect its overall success. Natural disasters cannot be prevented but only prepared for and are, unfortunately, inevitable. This study is significant because its analysis of the Forever especially for cities that rely heavily on tourism as an economic driving force.

## The Storm of Storms

For many years, scientists completed multiple studies suggesting the significant threat a hurricane posed to the New Orleans metropolitan area if it received a direct hit (Travis, 2005, p.1656). Ivor van Heerden, director of the Louisiana State University Center for Public Health Impacts of Hurricanes, analyzed every aspect of a hurricane that could bring devastation to the city. Heerden and his team studied every direct result of a hurricane hitting the city, from how the city would flood to the evacuation process in an effort to warn officials of the impact a storm would have on the city. “We called this 100 percent,” said Van Heerden, speaking exasperatedly about the devastation Hurricane Katrina caused (Travis, 2005, p.1656).

Katrina began in the western Atlantic Ocean as a small tropical depression; it became Tropical Storm Katrina on August 24, 2005, and a Category 1 hurricane a day later. After making landfall in Florida and killing seven people, the storm entered the Gulf of Mexico where the warm waters helped it to strengthen into a Category 5. Initially the storm was predicted to make landfall on the Florida panhandle, but a shift in the winds changed the path of the hurricane, taking it on a more northwesterly tract (National Hurricane Center, n.d.).

Once the outer storm bands began to hit land, Katrina downgraded to a Category 3 before landfall (Wall, 2008, p. 453). The storm’s eye hit Buras, Louisiana in Plaquemines Parish. State officials, residents, and the country held their breath as they watched water slowly, then rapidly rise along the Gulf Coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi (Oshinsky, 2006 July 9).

The exact sequence of flooding is unclear, but the first signs of the worst flooding were experienced in the eastern section of the city near the I-10 overpass (Wall, 2008, p. 454). As damage was assessed after Katrina’s landfall, officials recognized that hundreds of thousands of residents needed to be evacuated quickly and efficiently. These residents were without food, water or shelter, while heat and humidity remained unbearable in the high 90’s (Oshinsky, 2006,

July 9). New Orleans, the state of Louisiana and federal government officials dealt with a unique crisis.

More than 1,450 people died and 250,000 homes and businesses destroyed (LRA Quarterly Report, 2008). Anger, exhaustion and fatigue consumed residents and officials. People began to raid local businesses for food and water. As looters began to carry away non-essential items, chaos erupted in the city (Oshinsky, 2006 July 9).

During the turmoil, press and other media members provided continuous coverage of the natural and man-made disasters. Brian Williams of NBC, Anderson Cooper of CNN, and Shepard Smith of FOX News, were a few of the journalists to set up camp in the devastated city. Recent authors studying the hurricane press coverage commented on this saying, “With the television cameras focused on the plight of the victims crying for help from rooftops...the nation received a frightening view of the horrors of the catastrophe.” In efforts to quickly convey the situation through news reports, journalists reported stories without accurate fact checking. An example of the dramatic news packages included Mayor C. Ray Nagin’s report that “little babies” were being raped in the Superdome (Wall, 2008, p. 459). Stories of dead bodies piling up and assumptions of the death toll reaching 10,000 in the city were also reported (Wall, 2008, p. 459). The three aforementioned accounts proved false, but these reports only furthered the negative image that New Orleans obtained after Katrina. As an unintended consequence, the cities poverty, education, and local government tribulations were exposed.

### Tourism Industry

“The Crescent City,” “The Gateway to the Mississippi Valley,” “America’s Most Interesting City,” “The City that Care Forgot,” and the “The Big Easy” are all taglines that New Orleans, Louisiana has adopted over the years. Throughout the past 30 years, the city



continually focuses its efforts to attract tourists by constantly redefine its image (Clement, 2008, p. 1077).

The “holy trinity” of food, music and history, “unites the diverse cultural attributes of the city into a set of easily recognized and evocative themes” (Gotham, 2007, p. 834). Although sophisticated travelers from around the world have always been intrigued by the birthplace of jazz, the “the holy trinity” provided a way to synthesize and unite all the city has to offer, and attract the average domestic and international tourists (Gotham, 2007). It was not until the 1970’s, however, that tourism became an economic provider for the state.

After demand declined for the city as a military shipbuilding port and chemical processing center since the 1950s, New Orleans decided that the cure for the economic downturn would be tourism (Gotham, 2007, 831). Throughout the 1970s, the city placed emphasis on marketing and branding (Gotham, 2007, 832). “In the 1970s and 80s the French Quarter became more firmly entrenched as the center of a “Disneyfied” New Orleans (Souther, 2007, p. 809). The “wharf-lined riverfront” became home to many tourist locations such as Jax Brewery, RiverWalk Marketplace, Canal Place, Aquarium of the Americas, Harrah’s Casino, a Hilton Hotel, and a mile-long convention center (p. 809).

The further development of New Orleans as a tourist destination can also be attributed to the 1984 World’s Fair. It was, according to Webster (2005) the birth of modern day tourism in the city. “From the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition in New Orleans came the RiverWalk and the redevelopment of the Warehouse District, which spurred a cultural renaissance that included world-renowned restaurants, art galleries on Julia Street and the Louisiana Children’s, Ogden and D-Day museums, among others” (Webster, 2005). Stephen Perry, President of the NOCVB, says the greatest impact of the fair was the construction of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, a facility that still has a huge economic impact for the tourism industry in the city

(Webster, 2005). Today, tourism accounts for 35 percent of the city's annual operating budget, employing 85,000 residents. It is the second largest industry in the state of Louisiana, and generates \$5 billion in spending annually (Louisiana Research Team, 2005).

Festivals are also a main contributor to tourism revenue. The famous and long standing tradition of Mardi Gras, literally translating to "Fat Tuesday," is the celebration before the Catholic season of lent begins on Ash Wednesday. The festival begins on January 6 every year and brings in millions of people each year (Mardi Gras Day, n.d.). Along with the famous tradition of Mardi Gras, festivals such as the *New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival* established in 1970, were created in order to embrace New Orleans musical culture, and celebrate the birthplace of jazz (New Orleans Jazz Fest History, n.d.).

Other events such as *ESSENCE Music Festival* and the *State Farm Bayou Classic* reflected the tourism industry's desire to reach a multi cultural niche audience of African Americans who had discretionary funds. The *State Farm Bayou Classic* is an annual football game between the historically black universities of Grambling and Southern. Dubbed the "most distinguishable sporting event in all of Black America," this football game is a deeply embedded tradition between the institutions (State Farm Bayou Classic, n.d.). Relatively new festivals, such as the *Voodoo Music Experience* bring forth tourists of a young and diverse demographic. Restoring these festivals after Katrina provided an economic boost to the struggling business (Table 1). A timeline of major annual festivals and milestones held in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina is located in Table 1.

"Without the money generated by New Orleans tourism, the state would have to raise an additional \$3,000 in taxes on every family in Louisiana to cover the deficit" (Fact Sheet, NOCVB, 2008).

**Table 1****Milestones of Recovery**

| <b>Milestone Date</b>     | <b>Description</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|
| August 29, 2005           | Hurricane Katrina hits. The tourism industry is forced to cancel \$2 billion of business and relocate hundreds of events through May 2006             |
| Thanksgiving Weekend 2005 | Audubon Zoo reopens   |
| February 2006             | 150 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mardi Gras welcomes 350,000 visitors   |
| February 2006             | Ernest N. Morial Convention Center partially reopens  |
| April 2006                | French Quarter Festival welcomes 350,000 visitors over three days   |
| April/May 2006            | The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Music Festival held with the message, "Witness the Healing Power of Music"  |
| September 25, 2006        | The Louisiana Superdome reopens with Monday Night Football: New Orleans Saints defeat the Atlanta Falcons before the largest audience in ESPN history |
| October 2006              | The cruise industry returns including the Norwegian Cruise Lines and Carnival Cruise Lines  |
| November 2006             | Annual State Farm Bayou Classic, featuring Grambling University vs. Southern University, returns to the Louisiana Superdome                           |
| November 2006             | Remainder of the Morial Convention Center reopens   |
| January 3, 2007           | Annual Allstate Sugar Bowl returns to the Louisiana Superdome with an LSU/Notre Dame match-up   |
| February 2007             | Mardi Gras held welcoming 800,000 visitors  |
| July 2007                 | Annual ESSENCE Music Festival returns   |

Source: *The New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau Annual Report 2008.*

In 2004, visitors to Louisiana spent more than \$9.9 billion and in term of tax revenues, this spending accounted for \$677 million of Louisiana revenues or 8.3% of the overall state budget (The Louisiana Research Team, 2005). These statistics exhibit the necessity of tourism for the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana.

#### New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau: A History

In 1960, local business leaders and members of the Chamber of Commerce formed the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Commission to promote New Orleans as a destination for conventioners and leisure visitors (J. Lotz, personal communication, March 24, 2009). The name changed in 1995 to the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau to conform to industry standard. Many events before the name change helped to shape the organization to become one of the leading convention and visitors bureaus in the nation.

With the opening of the Louisiana Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center within a ten-year period between 1975 and 1985, the tourism industry in New Orleans excelled (Annual Report, 2008, p. 4). As one of America's most recognizable landmarks, the Louisiana Superdome hosts the New Orleans Saints, along with many other sporting events such as the Allstate Sugar Bowl. The bowl, a NCAA football game, brings thousands of visitors to the city and has an economic impact of approximately \$100 million each year (NOCVB Hospitality Industry Report 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2008). The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center also hosts other conventions and events, bringing tourists who experience other attractions New Orleans has to offer (NOCVB Hospitality Industry Report, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2008).

The next decade brought economic struggle following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but the NOCVB fought hard to regain a foothold on the tourism industry. One of its initiatives was to create a welcome campaign titled, "We're Jazzed You're Here" (Annual Report, 2008, p.5). This campaign sought to attract local and domestic tourists, mainly visitors who could easily

arrive by car. Stephen Perry, president and CEO of the NOCVB, wanted these publics targeted due to the publics increased fear of flying after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Perry believed this above-mentioned slogan should resonate from every resident in the city, creating a warm welcome to each visitor (Annual report, 2008). The slogan appeared everywhere imaginable from billboards next the airport to taxi cab receipts. The campaign accomplished a major feat; 2004 was the record-breaking year wherein the city welcomed 10.1 million visitors, the world's largest conventions and helped the NOCVB become one of the top five in the country (Annual Report, 2008, p. 5). This accomplishment was short-lived as August 29, 2005 redefined the industry. After Hurricane Katrina hit, the NOCVB Annual Report (2008) stated cancellation of approximately 1 million hotel rooms between October 2005 and January 2006. Cancellation numbers dramatically decreased in 2006 with about 100,000 rooms reported cancelled. In August 2007, however, room cancellations were approximately 50,000, which may be attributed to the efforts of the NOCVB during the *Forever New Orleans* campaign (NOCVB Annual Report, 2008).

Tourism industry officials reacted to the initial shock of the hurricane and went into recovery mode swiftly. The NOCVB did its best to first locate its employees and make certain that they would return safely and quickly to New Orleans with proper living accommodations. Bringing employees back was the first step in reviving the tourism industry. Without employees to run the attractions, hotels, restaurants and bars, the industry would be unable to operate. (Annual Report, 2008, p. 6). Only 72 hours after Katrina made landfall, the NOCVB established relief funds to accomplish its first goal. With the help of Deveney Communications, a local award-winning public relations firm, the NOCVB located its employees and other local tourism workers and brought them back to the city using the funds collected (Annual Report, 2008, p. 6). Deveney Communications also aided the NOCVB in analyzing and documenting coverage of

tourism directly before, during and after the storm. The firm also helped the NOCVB enforce a positive image of the 2006 Mardi Gras celebration, when the city and tourism industry was suffering harsh criticism because the media thought it uncompassionate during a time of crisis (Deveney PR Report, 2006).

The New Orleans Index Report (2008) reported that the leisure and hospitality industry employed 43,864 workers in the first quarter of 2005. This number drastically decreased to 18,242 employees in the fourth quarter as a direct result of Hurricane Katrina. From then on, the numbers have steadily increased (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

**Employees of the Leisure & Hospitality Industry**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Quarter</b> | <b>Leisure &amp; Hospitality</b> |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>2005</b> | Q1             | 43,864                           |
|             | Q2             | 44,842                           |
|             | Q3             | 37,528                           |
|             | Q4             | <b>18,242</b>                    |
| <b>2006</b> | Q1             | 20,042                           |
|             | Q2             | 22,629                           |
|             | Q3             | 24,608                           |
|             | Q4             | 27,767                           |
| <b>2007</b> | Q1             | 28,493                           |
|             | Q2             | 29,169                           |
|             | Q3             | 29,555                           |

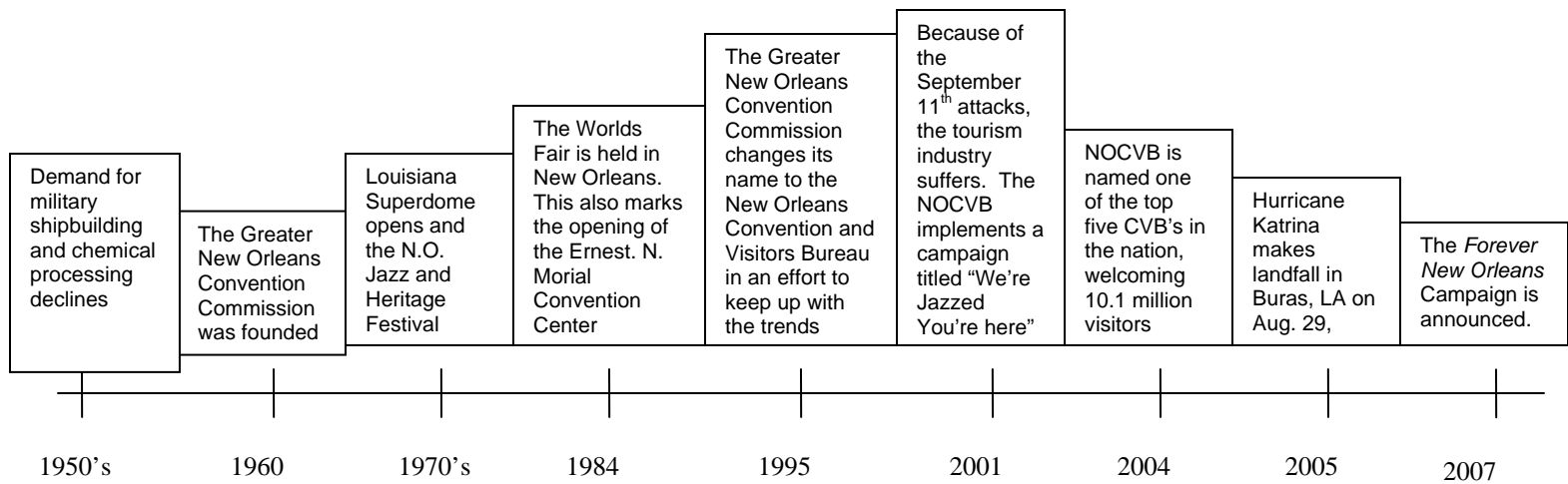
*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (The New Orleans Index, 2008).*

A \$30 million nationwide promotion of Louisiana, specifically focusing on New Orleans was created by Louisiana's official tourism ambassador, Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu and the State Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. Also contributing was the Louisiana Recovery Authority, a government organization that sought to ensure that cities throughout the state battered by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita rebuild safer, smarter and stronger. (LRA Quarterly Report, 2008, p. 8). The NOCVB used its portion of the money, \$8.5 million, to "re-image" the city through marketing, public relations and direct sales (Annual Report, 2008, p. 6). The NOCVB separated the funds as follows: \$5.1 million-*Forever New Orleans* Campaign, \$1.1 million-direct sales, staff salaries, \$290,000-web site development, \$785,000-convention incentives, \$1.1 million-marketing materials (Annual Report, 2008) (See Figure 1).

#### The City Post-Katrina

"We have an image challenge throughout the country," stated Mayor C. Ray Nagin in an interview with the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. "You ask what New Orleans is like today, and many people only have images of a city in crisis. And that's a concern, that they don't see the rebuilding that is going on" (Thevenot, 2005, p. 1). Even though recovery efforts continued and the French Quarter remained relatively untouched, the media continued to display images of a ravaged city. Locals received questions when traveling out of state concerning the condition of New Orleans. Many, such as journalist Eric Morgan, were irritated at the vision the media painted of their beloved city. Morgan elaborates, "because of the media, people believe we have infrastructure issues, hotels aren't open, restaurants aren't operational, and there are no supporting service industry workers" (Morgan, 2008).

The tourism industry wanted "to restore \$3 billion in lost business through unprecedented levels of sales, marketing, public relations, advertising, re-branding and social advocacy" (Industry Update, 2008).



**Figure 1- Timeline: History of New Orleans Tourism**



In January 2007 the NOCVB, with support from Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu announced “an aggressive, strategic, marketing, public relations and direct sales campaign designed to celebrate its authentic culture, lure domestic and international visitors back, preserve the city’s leading industry (hospitality) and overcome misperceptions about New Orleans among consumers” (NOCVB Press Release, 2007).

The campaign, *Forever New Orleans*, was designed to re-brand the city internationally by promoting and developing a deeper understanding of the New Orleans culture as unique and authentic. It was established in an effort to dismantle the negative stereotype that the media continued to perpetuate (NOCVB, Press Release, 2007). Perry explained, “Our marketing campaign is ultimately about New Orleans being a great place to live, work and visit. We must fill our hotels, have our restaurants brimming with diners, ensure that our galleries, shops and boutiques from the French Quarter to Magazine Street are filled with eager customers, our wonderful museums and attractions are busy with visitors, our artists crating and our musicians playing and our festivals and special celebrations reporting record attendance” (NOCVB, Press Release, 2007).

#### Forever New Orleans: The Team

The NOCVB is a private sector organization governed by 17 board members. The members represent different sectors of the hospitality industry. The organization has offices located in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Mexico, and Brazil. Louisiana Office of Tourism aids in maintaining the international offices. The organization also employs a sales manager in New Orleans to manage the Latin American and Asian Pacific Rim markets (Annual Report, 2008). The NOCVB also has offices across the United States including Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York (Annual Report, 2008).

The communications department in the main office located in New Orleans consists of five professionals, one of which is included in the dominant coalition of the organization, allowing this practitioner to assume a managerial role. Kelly Schulz, vice president of communications and public administration, is considered part of the NOCVB Executive Team (Fact Sheet, 2008). The other practitioners fall in rank as listed-Mary Beth Romig, Director of Communications and Public Relations, also performs managerial role, but not included in the dominant coalition. Technicians follow with titles Group Communication and Public Relations Coordinator, Media Services Coordinator and Communications Coordinator. The organization consists of four other departments including finance and administration, sales, tourism and client relations (Fact Sheet, 2008). “Public relations has always been a role of the tourism managers as they create programs and itineraries that spark interest from our travel professional clients. This role became even more important after the storm with the team working hand-in-hand with the public relations department” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 37).

Public relations academicians argue that strategies and tactics foster an organization’s ability to build and maintain relationships with its publics (Grunig, 2006). The NOCVB recognizes this function and has many partnerships including the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, State of Louisiana and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism. These relationships are “vital in furthering the city’s recovery and economic vitality” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 11).

Keeping in this mindset the bureau took the lead to create a public relations council. The council’s mission was to “foster cohesive communications with professionals from the hospitality and cultural community and creating a unified messaging and brand for New Orleans” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 11).

The NOCVB set out to use tourism and its promotion to rebuild the city. They wanted to accomplish this goal by bringing in a practitioner, Kelly Schulz, and collaborating with Weber Shandwick, a leading global public relations firm. The practitioners created an objective designed to preserve “the city’s largest industry and enticing visitors back despite daily international headlines about slow hurricane recovery, rising crime rates, political scandal and questions about future flood protection” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 12).

This objective was accomplished through a mixture of communication strategies and tactics: “proactive media relations, proactive outreach to business, trade and consumer reporters worldwide; reactive media relations; targeted press trips; media tours in the U.S. and Europe; and strategic communications with hundreds of thousands of customers” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 13). Out of these efforts, *Forever New Orleans*, a campaign to re-brand the city to the world, was born.

The challenge of this campaign is evident as the researcher searched for articles in local newspapers *The Times-Picayune* and *City Business*. It is evident tourism during this time, a year and a half after the storm, was not on the local media’s radar. Rising crime rates and getting residents to return seemed to top the news for the first year and a half after the storm. A few briefs found by the researchers mentioned the NOCVB, but nothing of significance was discovered. Deveney Communications, however, provided a report of all media that mentioned New Orleans tourism from December of 2005 to August 2007. The research provided indicated that the New Orleans tourism industry was mentioned in advertisements in travel magazines and television shows; news articles were more predominately found in the *Houston Chronicle* and *USA Today* than any local newspaper (Bacon, 2007). The extensive coverage in the Houston area can be attributed to the many displaced residents of New Orleans who evacuated there before and after the storm. One article published in the *Houston Chronicle* after the *Forever*

*New Orleans* campaign was announced, and the Mardi Gras festivities were beginning reinforces this presumption, “Even in the Times-Picayune, the hometown newspaper, headlines about the latest killing overshadowed those proclaiming the beginning of the parades and balls of Carnival” (Houston Chronicle, Feb. 11, 2007).

While the researcher was engaged in, the writing process two major news events had a direct impact on New Orleans. The city was dubbed “the most dangerous city” with the highest crime rate in the United States for 2008. This title only extenuates the challenges the industry faces (CNN, n.d.). “The Gulf Coast city of about 250,000, still grappling with the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina, was followed in the rankings by Camden, New Jersey; Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Missouri; and Oakland, California (CNN, n.d.).

The second major news story, which may affect the industry’s success, was the recent news of a global economic recession (New Y. The researcher speculates that with less discretionary cash, people will not participate in leisure travel.

### The Campaign

*Forever New Orleans*, designed to re-brand the city internationally by promoting and developing a deeper understanding of the unique and authentic culture. Publicity initially included a series of outdoor and print campaigns using various slogans, such as “New Orleans is Open. To Just About Anything,” “Soul is Waterproof,” “Old World, New Promise” (NOCVB, Press Release, 2007). CBS Outdoor, the largest out-of-home advertising company in the United States, generously donated outdoor billboards, valued at \$3 million (Morgan, 2008). They also included a thirty-minute television show titled “A Whole New Orleans.” The show first aired internationally and hosted by journalist Karen Carlson, was a global attempt to immediately attract visitors with displays of the city’s unique culture (Annual Report, 2008).

The NOCVB wanted to establish a presence in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Tokyo, London, Paris and Frankfurt in order to “strengthen its long term relationships and direct sales efforts with influencers such as meeting professionals, corporate and association decision makers, and travel professionals worldwide” (NOCVB, Press Release, 2007). Publicity for this part of the campaign included show-stopping streetcar displays in the heart of each city, such as Time Square in New York (Morgan, 2008). “[The streetcar] was seen by hundreds of thousands and drew at least 1,000 consumers inside for photos, visitor information and trip giveaways (Morgan, 2008). Other creative strategies included an interactive website, 24NOLA, where travelers plan an itinerary with one click, and advertisements appearing on airplane tray tables on 35 America West and US Airways plane (Annual Report, 2008).

The NOCVB claims the re-branding campaign gained the height of its attention when Harrah’s New Orleans Hotel & Casino adopted the ads as its own. “With the addition of Harrah’s media buys, “Forever New Orleans” ads appeared on outdoor billboards and in the in-flight magazines of American, Southwest and Continental Airlines, reaching millions of potential visitors” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 18).

The NOCVB also launched the “Be a Tourist In Your Hometown, Now More Than Ever” campaign in the summer of 2007 to encourage New Orleans natives to take advantage of all the attractions, such as dining specials, discounted admissions, and reduced parking rates. The *Forever New Orleans* team produced commercials, developed a website, and encouraged merchants to display posters for the campaign. Mary Beth Romig, Director of Communication for the NOCVB appeared on local shows promoting events occurring throughout the summer.

One of the campaign’s main goals was to strengthen the positive relationship the city maintained with the media (Annual Report, 2008). “Much of our work is devoted to educating mainstream media that New Orleans is a tale of two cities and survives by tourism, a multi-

billion-dollar, perception-driven industry” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 20). The NOCVB possessed a great public relations tool through its partnership with Cision, a company which produces media monitoring software (Annual Report, 2008, p. 20). This sophisticated media monitor provided quarterly reports which “analyzed key message delivery, frequency and tone of media coverage about the New Orleans brand” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 20). The organization continues to monitor news hourly in order to respond when necessary.

Despite the great strides that the NOCVB has made in the past two and a half years through this campaign, many questions remain unanswered for this rebuilding this city. “Katrina left behind a sodden, abandoned, urban wasteland they [residents] once called home. The devastation left by the flooding has, to an extent, reordered tourists’ spatial understanding of New Orleans” (Souther, 2007, p. 811). On each anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, residents of this country are consumed with images of houses still ravaged and FEMA trailers still decorating front yards. The truth is the city has yet to fully recover. How long can the efforts of organizations such as the NOCVB and its partners keep donor publics invested in its causes? Were the initial efforts enough to withstand time, and does this partly rely on how the public views the city’s reputation pre and post Katrina? The city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana and the country need answers for these important questions. However, with time, research efforts and a thorough review of literature we may be able to establish if these campaign efforts are a success in the revitalization of New Orleans.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Contingency Theory: An Introduction

Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified four models of public relations they believed professionals practiced. These models are: (1) press agency, publicity model or one-way asymmetrical; (2) public information model or one-way symmetrical; (3) the two way-asymmetrical model; and (4) the two way-symmetrical model. According to Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook (1997), “The practice of public relations is too complex, too fluid, and impinged by far too many variables for the academy to force it into the four boxes known as the four models of public relations” (p. 32). Therefore, Cancel and his colleagues argue that the strategies and tactics used in the field of public relations “depend” on many factors such as conditions, pressures, and opportunities in each different situation a practitioner faces (Cancel et al., 1997).

The contingency theory, developed to provide a more realistic theory for practitioners than the four models of public relations, allows the practitioner to realize the many factors that affect strategies and tactics used in the field (Cancel et al., 1997). This theory uses a continuum ranging from “pure advocacy” to “pure accommodative” strategies exemplifying the two extremes of a “wide range of discrete operational stances and public relations strategies that entail different degrees of advocacy and accommodation” (p. 37). The complex and intricate situations that practitioners deal with daily are handled with a variety of strategies and tactics, which makes this theory a more cohesive explanation of the practice of public relations.

### Ties to the Four Models

Grunig (2006) posits that the most successful organization is one that uses true two-way symmetrical communications, creating long-term relationships with stakeholders and other publics that are built upon trust. The stakeholders, publics, and management should keep their

goals aligned. If this is not achieved, according to Grunig, “stakeholders will either pressure the organization to change or oppose it in ways that add cost and risk to organizational policies and decisions” (Grunig, 2006, p. 159). Practitioners use this idealistic model to preserve the above-mentioned relationships today.

Grunig and Grunig (1992) elaborate on the processes necessary in order for public relations to be effective in a managerial position through the two-way symmetrical model of public relations. The authors posit that this model “epitomizes professional public relations and reflects the growing body of knowledge in the field” (Grunig, 1992, p. 320). They continue by explaining that this model also adds to the organizational effectiveness more than the other models of press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical (Grunig, 1992, p. 320). It is important to note that the authors realize the underlying value of this theory and its completely idealistic view on the practice. “The two-way symmetrical model of communication, as we have seen, is a real as well as a normative model” (Grunig, 1992, p. 320). Most organizations opt to use other models because an “authoritarian dominant coalition sees the approach as a threat to power” (Grunig, 1992, p. 320).

Cameron and colleagues argue that two-way symmetrical communications “must be elaborated upon and qualified to become a more mature and comprehensive theory, while remaining normative in purpose” (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 243). Unaccounted for within two-way symmetrical communications are the many factors that professional practitioners face daily. This, Cameron argues, is why two-way symmetrical communications is not referred to as a normative model, but rather as an ideal (Cameron et al., 2001). There are situations in which organizations cannot practice two-way symmetrical communications due to regulatory or legal issues (Reber & Cameron, 2003). The three main arguments for the contingency continuum are as follows: (1) An organization constantly should be progressing with its publics on a continuum,



despite stakeholders' pressure, from advocacy to accommodation; (2) A "matrix of dependent factors" is used in practice to determine where on the continuum the organization's communication strategies and tactics land; and (3) The organization (i.e., press agency or public information) should use a separation of strategies and tactics (Cameron et al., 2001).

### Advocacy and Accommodation

Cancel et al. (1997) along with Grunig (2006) define accommodation and advocacy in similar ways. Advocacy is generally explained to be a practitioners attempt to create acceptance and support for one's organization. This term often carries a negative connotation because it can be tied to strategies of persuasion and manipulation (Cancel et al., 1997). However, most researchers and practitioners agree, "professional advocacy is a socially acceptable and socially necessary role of public relations" (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 36). Comparatively, accommodation's function is to build "trust with external publics" and create mutually beneficial relationships with those publics (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 36).

Cameron and colleagues suggest that "excellent public relations activity cannot and should not be typified as a single model or even a hybrid model of practice" (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 245). There are over 80 different variables derived from "extensive literature review, personal experience in public relations practice, discussions with professionals, and deductions about situations faced by professionals in conflict situations" which could affect any given public at any time (Cameron et al., 2001, p. 245). Threats posed by legal constraints, pressure from management are two factors on the advocacy side of the continuum while the organization's social responsibility and a practitioner's personal morals fall on the total accommodation side of the continuum (Reber & Cameron, 2003). The theory attempts to use the actual practitioner's experience as the basis for the model, stating that these many variables can change according to the dynamics of the situation that the organization faces.

Cancel et al. (1997) argue that the initial stance that an organization takes depends on pre-existing variables and “influences the location along the continuum before it enters into a particular situation involving an external public” (p. 245). These variables, intertwined with new variables, evolve within each specific situation that an organization faces. Together, the variables intricately form the relationships between the organization and its publics. One must note that if the variables within a situation are not as strong as or stronger than those in the pre-disposed stance, the initial stance will remain the same. Cameron (2001, p. 246) continues,

Both predisposing and situational factors in the contingency theory of accommodation in public relations can move decision-makers toward increased accommodation, just as well as they can move the organization towards advocacy.

#### New Ties

In recent years, Grunig (2006) conveyed that his four models of public relations and Cancel et. al (1997)’s contingency theory are interrelated in order to foster relationships between practitioners and their publics. Grunig, unlike Cancel and her colleagues, who argue that symmetrical communications is an unrealistic ideal, would like to increase focus on “how symmetrical communication can be combined with coercive behaviors and the misuses of symmetrical communication” (p. 168-169). Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006) argue that the contingency theory is not yet a fully developed theory and call for further analysis of the contingent factors. The authors state that further analysis of the theory would help practitioners better comprehend the types of factors that affect practitioner’s use of accommodation or advocacy strategies and tactics.

The “tipping of the scale” between the four models and the contingency continuum is only furthered by Grunig’s aforementioned comments. The debate focused around the exact practices and functions of public relations becomes more heated as the years and the field gets larger. Public relations seems, like most other fields in present day, eager to consolidate with

other practices such as marketing to become more efficient and successful in this “globalized” society. David (2004) best describes the future of contingency theory and its application for public relations professionals through combined accommodative and advocacy components into his convergence model. He explains it as a natural part of the professional process and highlights how it should be combined in campaign practices to demonstrate the fluidity of public relations.

### Empirically Testing the Theory

Cameron, Cropp, and Reber (2001) sought more narrowly to define the theory as they tested six proscriptions to accommodation: (1) moral conviction of an organization, (2) countermanding demands by multiple publics, (3) regulatory constraints, (4) pressure from management, (5) jurisdiction issues and (6) legal constraints (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001, p. 248). The authors condensed their list to 80 distinct factors originally created by Cameron and colleagues in order for teachers and theorists to manage this theory usefully (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001). Interviews of eight top public relations managers were used in order to “learn whether these top executives had ever encountered situations that precluded taking an accommodative stance towards a public” (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001, p. 259). The results indicated that, while the constraints of contending publics, jurisdictional issues, and litigation/regulation did sometimes limit accommodation, it did not enforce advocacy practices (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber 2001). “Overall, the findings suggest that the inclination, often expressed in platitudes, is to practice two-way symmetrical communication” (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber 2001, p. 260). The authors sought to explain that contingency theory is a supplement to excellence theory in hopes that practitioners become aware of the challenges and obstacles that may occur in a time of crisis causing accommodation of publics to lessen (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber 2001).

Reber and Cameron (2003) attempted the first study that would quantify and operationalize “concepts related to contingency theory of accommodation in public relations” (p. 444). The authors surveyed ninety-one top public relations practitioners within the corporate world. Their results allowed them to construct a scale of five theoretical constructs: external threats, external public characteristics, organizational characteristics, public relations department characteristics, and dominant coalition characteristics (Reber & Cameron, 2003). The results indicated that practitioners strongly agree, “Bridge building is always the best public relations practice” (Reber & Cameron, 2003, p. 443). However, participants cited many instances where the dialogue with an external public is prohibited. “While the default response of practitioners was that bridge building is the best public relations practice, specific contingencies were found that limit bridge building or accommodation” (Reber & Cameron, 2003, p. 431). The contingencies cited for this limited accommodation were fear of legitimizing activist claims, credibility and commitment of an external public, and the place of public relations in the dominant coalition (Reber & Cameron, 2003).

Zhang and Cameron (2004) first explored the contingency theory on an international level through analyzing a conflict between the United States and China. In April 2001, a collision of a U.S Navy plane with a Chinese jet caused a stir in relations between the two countries when the U.S. plane survived the crash and the Chinese jet crashed into sea with the pilot missing. The study focused on six table clusters of variables (organization, diplomacy, characteristics of dominant coalition, internal threat, individual characteristics, and relationship characteristics). Two coders analyzed frames present in all stories and editorials present in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *National Review*. The coders grouped their findings based on each variable cluster. The findings indicated that when faced with a “morally intractable conflict” accommodation is impossible (p. 399). The U.S. used virtually no accommodation

during the crisis, but more of the opposite, focusing on advocacy strategies. The U.S. did not wish to take the responsibility of the conflict. “The final resolution was regarded as accommodation by China because there is a great linguistic complexity in translation. Thus, the Bush administration was in fact on the end of pure advocacy in the continuum of the Contingency Theory (p. 399).

The three above-mentioned studies show the great complexity, on professional and academic levels, that the practice of public relations faces. Thus, the researcher decided that the *Forever New Orleans* campaign must be examined through the lens of contingency theory. Many factors surrounding recovery from Hurricane Katrina, such as rising crime, negative media coverage, and widespread devastation to the city, also reinforces this study’s method.

Since Hurricane Katrina brought awareness of complex and intricate variables presented to the tourism industry during the campaign, the researcher believes the contingency theory is the best theories to use to analyze the campaign. This theory further supports the importance of practitioners becoming aware of the contingencies that can occur in a time of crisis. These contingencies can ultimately decrease the number of accommodative strategies and tactics used during the campaign, which may affect the overall success of a campaign.

### Research Questions

For the purposes of this thesis, contingency theory will be employed. This allowed the researcher to analyze the *Forever New Orleans* campaign’s efforts in the aftermath of Katrina.

**RQ 1:** Is the *Forever New Orleans* campaign complete or on going?

**RQ 2:** From an internal perspective, what strategies and tactics were utilized during the campaign?

**RQ 3:** From an internal perspective, what strategies could be classified as advocacy, accommodation?

**RQ 4:** Did predisposing or situational factors in the initial stage of the campaign influence decision makers toward increased accommodation or increased advocacy?

**RQ 5:** Can the campaign serve as a model for other cities faced with similar struggles in the tourism sector?

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study employed the qualitative approaches of both textual analysis and in-depth interviews. The qualitative method used in-depth interview based on Yin's (2003) model in order to gain the most insight from an internal perspective. These interviews were critical in analyzing the NOCVB's strategies and tactics of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign in relation to contingency theory. The researcher also determined that in order to gain an external perspective of the success of the tourism industry, a textual analysis was employed for a summary of media coverage from August 2005-August 2007.

### Case Study Approach

According to Yin (2003), case studies are used to “contribute to our knowledge of an individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena” (p. 1). This study sought to interview individual members of the NOCVB and analyze news articles concerning the tourism industry in New Orleans. These interviews and textual analysis allowed the researcher to better comprehend NOCVB's *Forever New Orleans* campaign through two separate views: the practitioners and the media. In this study, a holistic single case study is used to better understand the “global nature of an organization or a program” (p. 43).

This holistic case study focuses on the implementation of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign's strategies and tactics from beginning to end. The researcher determined the case study methodology would yield the best results to the aforementioned research questions.

### In-Depth Interviews

The “wealth of information” provided by in-depth interviews is the biggest advantage of this research method (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 135). The one-on-one interaction with participants allowed the researcher to gain a more intimate relationship with the respondent as well as observe the participants' non-verbal cues (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Since Hurricane

Katrina is a sensitive issue for most residents of New Orleans and most of the professionals interviewed during this study are residents of the city, the in-depth interviews also provided a more secure environment in which to raise these questions within because of the connection made between the respondent and interviewer (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

In-depth interviews the researcher attempted to conduct with three members of the NOCVB, the president, vice-president of communications and public administration, and a communications technician would provide a diverse view on the campaign's efforts. An interview conducted with a member of Deveney Communication will also be included in order to get an external perspective of the efforts. According to Grunig (2006), in order for public relations to succeed properly, it must "be empowered through representation in the dominant coalition or from having access to these powerful members of the organization" (p. 160). Therefore, it is important in this study to include members from the dominant coalition of the organization in order to properly evaluate the public relations practices of the campaign efforts.

These interviews contained questions pertaining to each individual's view of the recovery efforts of the tourism industry and whether or not he or she felt the strategies and tactics used by the NOCVB are successful.

Summarizing media coverage of tourism during the period from August 2005 to August 2007 had a two fold purpose: 1) It was aimed at helping to alleviate any bias on the part of the interviewee and 2) It provided an external view of how the campaign may have aided in the rebirth of the tourism industry. Articles concerning tourism published in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* were collected. These two papers are considered vital components of the nation's agenda-setting media and have a prominent voice for framing national opinion (Muzzatti & Featherston, 2007, p. 48). Silverman (2005) claims textual analysis works well in qualitative research studies that are primarily concerned with organizing and categorizing large



amounts of information. According to Silverman studies using textual analysis as a method should not conclude with statements of fact, but rather, they should look for pieces of information within the texts that allow the researchers to generalize about a group, culture, or society. The researcher concluded with generalizations on whether or not the articles maintained the positive image that the city is trying to preserve or if the articles continue to focus on the negative image that the media portrayed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

### Data Collection

#### Sample-Textual Analysis

After completing a search among articles dealing with tourism in the newspapers *USA Today* and *New York Times*, the researcher read all articles that contained significant relevance to tourism in New Orleans. The researcher then ranked the article as having a positive, negative or neutral tone concerning the tourism industry in the city. It should be noted that the two publications researched were chosen because of their large national circulation among other credentials. Specifically, *The New York Times* has a circulation of 1,000,665 and *USA Today* has a circulation of 2,293,310 (Vocus PR, Feb., 16, 2009). *The New York Times* is commonly known as one of the nation's most objective news sources. While *USA Today* also has a large national circulation, it is based in McClean, VA and geographically closer to New Orleans.

The articles analyzed were published between August 29, 2005, the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall, and August 29, 2007, the second anniversary of the storm, a total of 254 articles. By August 2007, the *Forever New Orleans* campaign had been in effect for eight months. This helped the researcher determine if the organization accomplished one of the campaign's main objectives of bringing visitors back to New Orleans despite the negative headlines of major news publications (NOCVB, Press Release, 2007). The researcher searched

the Lexis Nexis search engine for articles in the two newspapers with the keywords *tourism* and *New Orleans*.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This qualitative study sought to form generalizations about the individual organization analyzed (Yin, 2003); however, the generalizations derived from this campaign provide evidence of whether or not public relations practitioners recognize the contingency theory as the more practical approach to campaigns following a natural disaster.

The researcher thought it wise to first conduct the textual analysis in case any emerging themes revealed an aspect about the campaign of which the researcher was unaware. While the latter did not arise, she did feel it beneficial since her findings indicated from the textual analysis alone that the *Forever New Orleans* campaign seemed successful at debunking the media's negative image of the city.

### Textual Analysis

Two hundred and fifty four articles were collected and read. Forty six percent of the articles had a negative tone, followed by 32 percent with a neutral tone and 22 percent with a positive tone. The results of the data collection reveal that both *The New York Times* and *USA Today* focused on the devastation endured by New Orleans in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The majority of the articles written during the first six to twelve months following the storm contained negative to neutral tones. Articles deemed negative in tone were those that spoke of the destruction, crime, flood and displaced residents, as well as the effect this had on the tourism industry (Armour, 2005 Sept. 8; Eduardo, 2005 Aug.31). An article in *USA Today* titled "A 'new' New Orleans" alludes readers to believe that parts of the city may disappear: "Preservationism is practically a religion in New Orleans, so the possibility that major sections of the city will disappear is sending architecture lovers into a panic" (Puente, 2005 Oct. 7). Most stories, consequently, read like the following example from *The New York Times*:

In New Orleans, the mayor reported that rescue boats had begun pushing past dead bodies to look for the stranded living. Gas leaks began erupting into flames, and looking at the city, now at least 80 percent under water, it was hard not to think of last year's tsunami, or even ancient Pompeii. Disaster has, as it usually does, called up American generosity and instances of heroism. Young people helped the old onto rafts in flooded New Orleans streets, and exhausted rescue workers refused all offers of rest, while people as far away as Kansas and Arizona went online to offer shelter in their homes to the refugees. It was also a reminder of how much we rely on government to imagine the unimaginable and plan for the worst. As the levees of Lake Pontchartrain gave way, flooding New Orleans, it seemed pretty clear that in this case, government did not live up to the job (The New York Times, 2005 Aug. 31).

Articles with neutral tones were usually those that gave statistical evidence of destruction, that named businesses in operation and that named businesses remaining closed.

As New Orleans struggles to get back on its feet, the city's employers will play a major role. In some areas, it could be months before business returns to normal. But many employers, particularly the biggest ones in some crucial industries, are already beginning to reopen and bring employees back, often helping them find housing and supplying transportation. Here is an overview of employment in the city and in the center of tourism, the French Quarter.

#### Banks

Hibernia National Bank: 3,000

Whitney National Bank: 2,500

Of 107 Hibernia branches, 56 have reopened. About 20 branches were significantly

damaged; others are waiting for power to be restored. At Whitney, 108 of 148 branches have reopened.

#### Hotels/Casinos

Marriott: 2,800

Harrah's New Orleans Casino: 2,600

Hilton: 2,000

Hyatt: 450

One Marriott hotel has reopened; two more will reopen next week.

Regency will be closed through 2006, but it is accepting reservations for 2007. Most Hiltons are not taking reservations. Harrah's is closed and does not know when it will reopen. Some of its employees are looking for work at other Louisiana Harrah's casinos in Lake Charles and Baton Rouge.

(The New York Times, 2005 Sept. 17).

It is interesting to note that despite the many lives that were deeply affected by the disaster, tourism was one of the main topics in many of the stories printed in the initial aftermath (Lynch, 2005 Sept. 1; Stoller, 2005, Sept. 8). The following excerpt, written only days after the hurricane struck the city, demonstrates this and comes from an article in *USA Today* titled "New Orleans puts visitors on hold into fall":

New Orleans tourism officials who are grappling with the devastation across the city are telling visitors that it will be closed for months. 'Only the next few weeks will determine whether tourism will begin rebounding in late October or early November, or whether it is pushed into early next year,' says Stephen Perry, president of the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau. Perry says the city, one of the

nation's top four convention destinations, already has canceled all conventions and meetings planned into October (Sloan, 2005 Sept. 2).

Very few articles during the first year after the hurricane were positive in tone. One of the articles from *USA Today* written only a couple of weeks after the storm is surprisingly upbeat when writing about the outcome of the city after Katrina struck. The preservation of famed landmarks in the city is a fact that is left out of many of the articles when describing the damage.

As Katrina's floodwaters recede and damage is assessed, many famed New Orleans attractions are in better shape than initially feared. "It's like a big hand came down and protected historic buildings," says Stephen Perry, president of the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau. While it may be months before city services are fully restored and New Orleans is in shape for visitors, "the most popular and important tourist infrastructure survived and fared very well compared to other parts of the city," Perry says. The picturesque French Quarter is "almost completely preserved," Perry says (Yancey, 2005 Sept. 9).

Other articles, on the contrary, appeared to criticize the industry claiming that New Orleans cannot rely solely on tourism to fix its problems. "Without the rejuvenation of the city's varied industries, and with too much reliance on tourism, the city could become something of a stage set where people work but do not live, some experts said" (Pogrebin, 2005 Sept. 14). Many other articles that shared this theme stated concern with heavy reliance on tourism, claiming that solely relying on tourism to recover the city would only keep New Orleans stagnant and poverty stricken (Nasser, 2005 Sept 19; Nocera, 2005 Sept 24).

In contrast, some articles stressed the importance of tourism to the recovery of the city. Perry is quoted in *The New York Times* reiterating this stance.

How fast the industry gets back on its feet is critical to the city's recovery. From an economic point of view, the recovery of the tourism industry will be of significant help, he said. It will generate the revenue allowing the city to bounce back. We are taking a page out of Mayor Giuliani's handbook. We will be saying, don't just send your dollars. Come to New Orleans. Don't stay away. (Darlin & Elliot, 2005 Sept. 3).

While the negative stories outweigh the positive in this particular research, it seems the NOCVB attempted to be transparent in the media. It is important to practice transparency in media relations in order to create lasting relationships with reporters (Porterfield & Carnes, 2008). Employees quoted in articles spoke of the disaster but also encouraged visitors to return to the city: "Tourism officials are asking leisure travelers to wait until the end of the year to return to New Orleans while workers continue rebuilding. Many of the city's restaurants and hotels are beginning the slow process of reopening" (New York Times, 2005, Oct. 16). Schulz is also quoted in an article published in *USA Today*. The a media strategy used in the interview involved both advocacy for the city's tourism industry through inviting tourist back, and accommodation for the organization's publics through her empathetic tone in her explanation and admittance of a confusing message.

Closing that gap between the readiness and the relative emptiness is the major challenge facing the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau today as it welcomes several hundred world media outlets arriving to report on Tuesday's first anniversary of one of the greatest natural and engineering catastrophes in U.S. history. 'Much of that coverage will focus on the still-abandoned neighborhoods and the bureaucratic lethargy that hampers the rebuilding. We call it a tale of two cities and it really is,' Schulz says. 'People see [images of] the devastation of the neighborhoods, and

then we say, its fine, come visit! So it's confusing but seeing is believing, and we encourage people to come and see for themselves' (Shriver, 2007 Aug. 25).

This excerpt does display transparency, but the researcher also discovered that this type of transparency occurs less frequently in articles written after the campaign actually begins. The staff of the NOCVB is not as frequently quoted in the 2007 articles, especially articles that contain evidence of parts of the city still in ruins. The staff only comments in articles of positive connotation appearing in *The New York Times* with titles such as "Casinos Booming In Katrina's Wake as cash pour in" and "The arena bowl lands in New Orleans." These two articles only praised the return of events and attractions, which in turn brings in tourists.

To reiterate this point, an article marking the two year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, entitled "After Two Years, a Tangled Mix of Good and Bad," lacked commentary from the NOCVB. What one would assume to be a long article is a brief 701 words about the uncertainty of recovery. This leads the researcher to speculate a few different possibilities; (1) the reporter failed to contact the correct people, (2) the publication did not deem the second anniversary newsworthy or (3) The NOCVB declined comment since the story had negative connotation. The absence of the NOCVB from these articles may have been part of a strategy implemented through its efforts in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign.

After analyzing all articles, it was determined that the NOCVB's main objective in media relations was to express the importance of tourism to the city and state's economy (Sloan, 2005 Sept. 15; Steinhauer, 2005 Nov. 8). Perry, quoted in both publications in numerous articles, restates the statistical figures aforementioned in this paper on the economic reliance the city has on tourism. "The tourist industry employed 81,000 people, almost 20 percent of the city's work force," said Perry (Darlin & Elliot, 2005 Sept. 3).



Another interesting theme found in the data supports success of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign. During 2007, the year in which the campaign launched, the majority of articles retrieved were written in a positive tone towards tourism, but there was also a decline in the articles written about tourism altogether. The articles in most cases focused on an event or organization that returned after the storm.

Producer Quint Davis is heralding a second miracle as Jazz Fest's opening weekend launches today with a bill that boasts Van Morrison, Norah Jones, Jerry Lee Lewis, Brad Paisley, Ludacris and a host of hometown heroes, from Dr. John to Rockin' Dopsie Jr. to Terence Blanchard. For its May 4-6 closer, headliners include John Mayer, Steely Dan, ZZ Top, John Legend, Joss Stone, New Edition and George Benson. 'This is the most talent we have ever had, the deepest in all categories. We're hitting all cylinders. The fact that the 37-year-old institution is able to stage its richest smorgasbord a mere 20 months after a cataclysmic hurricane is testament to New Orleans' cultural vitality, Davis says. You can destroy our city, and that unique culture feeds us all the more,' he says. That's why Jazz Fest plays such a role in energizing people. It's a catalyst for rejuvenation. People feel a hunger to connect with these great performers. I've traveled all over and fell in love with Sweden and New Zealand, but there's only one New Orleans. You can't run from Mother Nature. But Mother Nature isn't as strong as the music of New Orleans (Gundersen, 2007 April 27).

The limited number of articles written in 2007, totaling only 15, could be a result of the publications not deeming the success of the industry as newsworthy, but instead deeming only destruction and devastation as newsworthy. It could also indicate that the issues of Hurricane Katrina were no longer newsworthy because of the amount of time that had passed. It should also be noted that while the positive articles of tourism always praised the city's recovery of

tourist destinations like the French Quarter and Uptown New Orleans, it would always include assertions of damage in parts of the city where tourists do not frequent.

Downtown blocks are moribund while Magazine Street, in the Uptown section, is humming. The Lower Ninth Ward remains a wasteland, and the Gentilly neighborhood is reawakening. Crime is up, but so is tourism. The medical district in central New Orleans remains empty today, but in an announcement this week, the Department of Veterans Affairs appeared committed to re-establishing a hospital there (Nossiter, 2007 Aug. 25).

While the *Forever New Orleans* campaign can be considered successful through the qualitative textual analysis completed in this study based solely on tone of news articles associated with the tourism industry, the researcher would like to note that only one article appeared that spoke directly about the campaign. The article, published in *The New York Times*, was written about the street car display in Times Square, a publicity objective of the campaign described previously in the paper. The author believes this to be noteworthy since the NOCVB grabbed the attention of such a largely circulated publication and received free and notable advertisement.

Yesterday, on a street in Times Square, there were no azaleas or Spanish moss, no hot and fetid air, no maligned wives in slips or coarse husbands in torn T-shirts, no New Orleans of the imagination at all. But there was, on windy West 44th Street, parked outside the television studios of "Good Morning America," a streetcar named Desire. The entire car, which arrived from New Jersey on Monday evening and will remain in place today, was a promotional ploy by a tourist board to get more people to visit New Orleans, where there are few streetcars running and few neighborhoods rebuilt since the levees broke during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Ramirez, 2007 April 11).

It is difficult for the researcher to make a broad generalization and declare the campaign a success based on news articles written about the tourism industry as a whole due to constraining variables. Constraining variables would be other campaigns congruent with the NOCVB's, time passed, media priorities and the two publications' definitions of newsworthiness.

### Interviews

Once the interviews were complete, the researcher transcribed the interviews and searched for strategies and tactics along with other themes that provided answers to research questions. To ensure an accurate transcription, all interviews were recorded. The answers were then grouped according to common themes, answers to research questions, and other findings.

The study consisted of two personal interviews, one with a member of an affiliate communication firm, the other a member of the NOCVB staff. Personal interviews were done with John Deveney, president of Deveney Communications, which is one of the top communications firm in the country, and Jennifer Lotz, communication coordinator for the NOCVB. The researcher conducted the in-depth interview with John Deveney via telephone, and lasted approximately 20 minutes. Jennifer Lotz responded to interview questions via email.

When analyzing the interviews, four themes transpire through discussions of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign. The themes of collaboration, emotion, dual accommodation and advocacy strategies and tactics, and campaign success emerged in both interviews. While these proved common themes in each interview, each interviewee approached the topic from a different perspective.

## Collaboration

Collaboration was the main theme among interviewees concerning strategies and tactics. While Deveney seems to give more emphasis on this strategy than Lotz, they both seem to equate it with success.

**Deveney:** “Most beneficial work [of the NOCVB] was bringing together leaders to collaborate and work together and that really sped the recovery efforts. They brought both leaders of the city and the industry, hoteliers, restaurateurs, etc. coming together and working in a collaborative mode.”

Lotz also stresses that this is a strategy still implemented today.

**Lotz:** “...Three and a half years later, we still work with other organizations within the city to make New Orleans the best it can be. The New Orleans CVB works closely with the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation to collaborate on some projects and we have a close working relationship with the New Orleans Morial Convention Center. As a communications department, we work with our members to host journalist and generate news stories about their organization and New Orleans. This in turn not only benefits our members, but the city of New Orleans as a whole.”

**Lotz:** “Good relationships within all departments of the CVB as well as the partnerships among several New Orleans entities contribute to the success.”

It seems that the collaboration between everyone involved in the recovery of the tourism industry helped the NOCVB disseminate the message of its campaign, without competing with others messages. This collaboration also helped to communicate the message internally in the hospitality organizations, down to the wait staffs and bell boys at the restaurants and hotels throughout the city.

It was important for the entire industry to align its goals and message in order to eliminate competing messages that would reach target publics. By having one, unified message the public received it directly, emanating from every form of communication available to everyone involved in the city's recovery of tourism, therefore magnifying its relevance and importance.

### Emotion

The majority of staff members in the NOCVB and the affiliate organization, Deveney Communications, are from the New Orleans area. Deveney and Lotz both stated that they each had a huge connection to this project and to the city.

**Deveney:** “The work that we did with the CVB during and following Katrina really stands out as a career highlight. We worked with outstanding professionals and we felt very passionate about the efforts, having worked literally every waking hour on the media center and recovery.”

**Lotz:** “The phrase [Forever New Orleans] was chosen because it sums up the emotions of those that love New Orleans. New Orleans is a place like no other in the world, because of the way the city makes you feel while you are here and when you leave...I think emotions are a powerful factor in discretionary decision making, especially when it comes to travel.”

This passion could have worked in both negative and positive ways throughout the campaign. This strong emotion may have affected rational decision making skills at some points, allowing the professionals to become defensive of the city and the tourism industry. It is comparable to a “rally around the flag” effect seen during wartimes.

### Dual use of accommodation and advocacy strategies and tactics

Cancel et al. (1997) state that the initial stance an organization takes depends on pre-existing variables that influence their choices of strategies and tactics. These variables intertwine

with new variables that arrive during the creation of a campaign or event and evolve within each specific situation that an organization faces. Together these variables form the relationships between the organization and its publics. Research also notes that there should be a balance between accommodation and advocacy strategies and tactics and organizations, despite the many different variables above, should be constantly progressing with its publics on a continuum from advocacy to accommodation, despite any pressures (Cameron et. Al, 2007).

In the instance of the NOCVB, some variables that may have affected its choices of strategies and tactics can range from the actual devastation that the city faced, to the lack of funds and pressures from the leaders of the city, industry, and state, and misinterpretation by the media.

Despite the many situational variables, both persons interviewed claimed the organization used both accommodation and advocacy strategies in the campaign.

**Deveney:** “I think they did both. CVB did a masterful job making sure they were bringing people to the table and that everyone’s voice was heard. I think by doing this they also benefited from the perspective of the different council members. I think they advocated the cause more (than accommodating publics) possibly because that is what their publics wanted them to do.”

**Lotz:** “I would say both. The *Forever New Orleans* campaign advocated change in perception while accommodating locals and those with an affinity for New Orleans. The *Forever New Orleans* campaign communicated to the world that New Orleans was an authentic place in the past, it is unique now and it forever will be this way.”

It seems from the answers above, however, that the publics accommodated were only local publics and leaders of the industry. While this is an effective measure, they are not accommodating all publics. Its largest public, tourists, were left out of the discussion

completely. From the perspective of the interviewees and the background research conducted little accommodation of tourists, if any, was made throughout the campaign.

### Success

Success can be a hard variable to measure in a campaign. Throughout the NOCVB's Annual Report (2007), success is seen in numbers. The amount of visitors touring the city, the number of people attending conferences in the city since the storm hit and so on. Deveney claims success of the campaign simply because the organization claims success of the campaign. Lotz, in keeping with the theme of the organization's report, defines success in numbers as well.

**Lotz:** "I definitely believe this campaign is successful. I drive around town and see *Forever New Orleans* bumper stickers on local cars. You see it in the 7.1 million visitors we hosted in 2007. Success was seen in this year's Mardi Gras where our attendance and hotel occupancy rates rivaled 2005 pre-Katrina numbers."

While success could also be measured in the media's positive coverage of the city, neither person mentions that aspect when asked about the success of the campaign, even though one of the campaign's main objectives was to debunk the negative media coverage of New Orleans. As found in the textual analysis, almost all articles written in 2007 were written in a positive tone. The articles, however, also significantly decreased in 2007, the year the campaign was launched.

The interviews conducted and the articles analyzed allowed the researcher to compare and contrast many different variables of the campaign. An interesting finding occurred during her interview with Lotz. Lotz states that part of the NOCVB's strategy during the campaign was to refer to New Orleans as "a tale of two cities."

**Lotz:** "We often describe New Orleans as a "tale of two cities." While the outlying areas of New Orleans are still struggling to recover to this day, the French Quarter was relatively

unaffected. We needed the *Forever New Orleans* campaign to help people eliminate the horrible pictures they saw on their TVs and realize that the parts of the city they loved so much looked like the same.”

Schulz is also quoted using this terminology in an article previously mentioned in the textual analysis. This tactic used to describe the city helps the NOCVB to empathize with other areas of the city that have not yet recovered. Although this tactic was not mentioned in the Annual Report (2007), it does demonstrate how the organization is following the continuum from advocacy to accommodation of its publics. By using this terminology, “a tale of two cities,” the organization is admitting that not all areas of New Orleans had recovered and did not want its publics to be misinformed. Using this phrase also demonstrates, according to Lotz, that the NOCVB realizes that there are still areas that are struggling presently and sympathizes with their struggles.

The persons interviewed each had a very different perspective of the campaign. Deveney having worked with the organization, mostly before the campaign was initiated, and Lotz, working with the NOCVB after the campaign was initiated. These two views allow the researcher to gain insight into two very different stages of the campaign from two practitioners in different stages of their careers. This diverse perspective aided the researcher in successfully concluding her results by combining these views and the textual analysis with the extensive background research conducted in the preliminary stages of this study.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The *Forever New Orleans* campaign received relatively positive reviews in both interviews and in the media. The NOCVB itself uses numbers of tourists to tout its success through its annual report, while its affiliate indicated the success of the campaign solely based on the assertion of the organization. The articles analyzed and interviews collected allowed the researcher enough information, combined with her background in public relations, to draw conclusions about the campaign and the organization's everyday public relations practices.

**RQ 1:** Is the *Forever New Orleans* campaign complete or on going?

One aspect of the campaign that was unclear was the end date of the entire campaign. Kim Priez, vice president of tourism at the NOCVB, confirmed via email in early December that the campaign is an ongoing initiative (K. Priez, personal communication, December 8, 2008). However, when the researcher asked Deveney in an in-depth interview, he was not aware of the campaign's timeline.

This was the first aspect of the campaign that caused the researcher to reevaluate its claim of success. A strong public relations campaign has distinct timelines and allows practitioners to focus efforts and resources on the project. It also allows practitioners to anticipate contingencies and plan for them beforehand (Porterfield & Carnes, 2008).

The missing timeline also caused reevaluation of the organization's definition of a public relations campaign and questioned whether the *Forever New Orleans* campaign is strictly an advertising campaign. In the Annual Report (2007), the *Forever New Orleans* campaign is defined as an "aggressive strategic marketing, public relations and direct sales campaign" (pg. 16). An advertising campaign by definition only advocates the organization's causes through paid time and space in media, while a public relations campaign builds mutually beneficial relationships with its publics.

Jennifer Lotz reinforces this assumption when she describes the campaign, using the word advertising in her interview. “The *Forever New Orleans* Ad Campaign is a campaign we use everyday” (J. Lotz, personal communication, March 2, 2009). Another example reiterates this assertion occurred during Mardi Gras 2009 when the researcher noticed the campaign logo on several buses around the city, but did not find current strategies or tactics during her continuing research of the organization and its efforts. Therefore, the researcher concluded that, because of the lack of two way symmetrical strategies and tactics and stewardship that this was solely an advertising campaign using the *Forever New Orleans* logo.

**RQ 2:** From an internal perspective, what strategies and tactics were utilized during the campaign?

The researcher was not able to obtain answers to this research question from the NOCVB, but rather, only obtained information regarding this question from the organization’s 2005-2007 Annual Report. In the report, the organization states that it uses a variety of “proactive media relations, proactive outreach to business, trade and consumer reporters worldwide; reactive media relations; targeted press trips; media tours in the U.S. and Europe; and strategic communications with hundreds of thousands of customers” (Annual Report, 2008, p. 13). In seeking interviews, the researcher was trying to define the more specific strategic public relations strategies and tactics used in media relations and other strategic communications that the organization indicated it used. Instead, research found the organization used mostly advertising strategies, promoting the campaign on transportation, television, in different locations (i.e. streetcar display) and on the web.

In the initial stages of the campaign, the report reveals the NOCVB formed a public relations council composed of tourism industry leaders. Deveney and Lotz mentioned a similar collaboration when each gave its perspective of the types of strategies and tactics used to benefit

the campaign. Both agreed that the organization's greatest strategy was when it brought together leaders of the city and tourism industry to collaborate in order to speed up the recovery of the industry. This seems an approach in the contingency theory, which would fall more on the accommodative side of the continuum. This also helped to create long-term relationships that are built upon trust with stakeholders and other publics and allowed these publics to keep everyone's goals aligned. This is congruent with both the contingency theory's principles and Grunig's (2006) ideal two-way symmetrical communication model.

**RQ 3:** From an internal perspective, what strategies could be classified as advocacy, accommodation?

Advertising, a fast, expensive and relatively easy way to get a message out, does not create any lasting relationships with publics, the main function of any public relations campaign. Most of the aforementioned strategies and tactics in the annual report clearly fall in this paradigm, and are considered pure advocacy on the contingency continuum.

Some efforts of the campaign fell on the accommodation side of the continuum, such as forming a public relations council with the organization's competitors and using transparency strategies in media relation. These accommodative strategies use what Grunig calls two-way symmetrical communications with only one specific public, the researcher would argue, an elite public. According to the contingency theory, these choices may have depended on many factors, including pressures from this elite public of city and industry leaders, the conditions of the city in the aftermath of the storm and different time constraints that made it difficult to provide any form of accommodation to other publics such as the actual tourists. It is unclear why these choices were made since the researcher has extremely little insight into the inner workings of the organization. This limitation will be discussed later in the paper.

The NOCVB also failed, from the researcher's perspective, to identify its publics when distinguishing between strategies that leaned toward the advocacy side of the continuum or the accommodation side of the continuum. Deveney indicated that the organization used more advocacy in the campaign because that is what the organization's publics wanted it to do, although he never specifies the publics. Based on his response, he is arguably speaking of the "elite" public of state, city and tourism industry leaders. Publics of this organization not only consist of "elite" public but also domestic and international tourists. The importance of tourists, especially international visitors is demonstrated through personal communication the researcher had with Kim Priez.

International visitors are important to New Orleans' tourism industry because they like to experience all aspects of the city and feel right at home with the international flair and culture of New Orleans. Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans received approximately 800,000 visitors from overseas. These tourists stay longer than domestic travelers and spend, on average, \$1,200 per day (K. Priez, personal communication, December 8, 2008). The NOCVB estimates the number of international visitors has dropped to under 300,000 in 2007, although it was not clear whether this was due to the hurricane or other issues (K. Priez, personal communication, December 8, 2008).

**RQ 4:** Did predisposing or situational factors in the initial stage of the campaign influence decision makers toward increased accommodation or increased advocacy?

Deveney confirmed the preceding answer with a simple "yes," but the answer to this question is incredibly intricate in nature, which may have halted a more candid answer. From the research done for this study in the public relations field, situations that arise in everyday practice all have their own set of details and factors that cause a practitioner to handle each one differently (Cancel et al., 1997). In midst of a situation such as the one the NOCVB faced after

Katrina, there were bound to be many different variables, which affected the decisions throughout the campaign. An example from the textual analysis portion of this research may reveal insight into this. In a preceding section of this paper, Kelly Schulz is quoted in an article from *USA Today* (Gunderson, 2007 April 27) explaining the confusion of the messages, which the media and the organization were sending. Through admitting this, Schulz is practicing on the more accommodative side of the continuum and responding to a public's reaction to the message. Undoubtedly, this situational factor was unaccounted for in the preliminary stages of the campaign. It put enough pressure on the organization to respond in a strategic manner. This is a clear example of contingency theory at work.

**RQ 5:** Can the campaign serve as a model for other cities faced with similar struggles in the tourism sector?

This study's findings indicate that the *Forever New Orleans* campaign did not conform to the classic definition of a public relations campaign. The organization's strategies and tactics failed to accommodate its publics, thus failed to build mutually beneficial relationships. Instead, the NOCVB opted to use mostly advertising strategies and tactics. However, the textual analysis section of this study revealed that articles written about the industry in 2007, the year the campaign started, were more positive in tone; therefore, achieving one of the main objectives of the campaign--debunking the negative media coverage the city was receiving.

Along with the NOCVB, other entities focused on reviving the tourism industry of the city. This makes the success of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign difficult to measure since these organizations were simultaneously launching efforts as well. Some of the organizations include the Lieutenant Governor's Office, The Louisiana Recovery Authority and the State Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

The researcher concluded that the *Forever New Orleans* campaign could serve as an advertising campaign model, rather than a public relations campaign model to cities that heavily rely on tourism and face a natural disaster. While facets of this campaign, such as the media relations practiced, may be beneficial to emulate, there are clearly issues with timelines, strategies and tactics.

Both Deveney and Lotz agree that this can serve as strictly a model for other cities faced with similar struggles. While the author disagrees with that statement, she does understand that the campaign may be beneficial for other cities such as Miami and Galveston to model as strictly an advertising campaign if these coastal cities were to face similar circumstances.

### Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was the inability to obtain in-depth interviews with people from the NOCVB. The depth of this study would have greatly increased with interviews with the members of the NOCVB who created and implemented the *Forever New Orleans* campaign. When contacted for interviews by email, all members initially accepted the invitation to be interviewed. On the days of the scheduled interviews, the members of the organization's communication department cancelled because of time constraints. All people within the organizations with whom the researcher requested interviews after cancellation referred the researcher to materials that she already possessed or affiliated communication companies.

Even though this limitation provided obstacles, it proved to be a finding. If a balance between accommodation and advocacy is vital in any public relations campaign, then the researcher expected all members of the dominant coalition to be open to conversations and very forthcoming with information. The opposite response, however, provided different results. Because the dominant coalition was not accommodating in any attempts to speak about the campaign, its practices of public relations are in question.

Eventually, one member of the NOCVB's communication department responded to the interview questions via e-mail, and John Deveney responded via telephone. Unfortunately, these interviews did not allow the researcher to observe non-verbal cues or form a more intimate relationship with the interviewee. While the researcher was very grateful for the cooperation, she still did not receive a perspective of the campaign from someone who was actually involved in the initial roll-out. Deveney participated in the efforts before the campaign, while Lotz started a year after the initial roll-out.

Fortunately, for the tourism industry, the city of New Orleans seems to be a tourism magnet because of its rich history and longstanding reputation of an authentic southern city. This factor is also beneficial for the NOCVB since it seems, with the researcher's experience with the organization, that it practices poor accommodative public relations practices. Unfortunately, these factors and other constraining variables such as congruent campaigns and time passed made it hard to distinguish the *Forever New Orleans* campaign as a success or failure. The lack of accommodation of publics in the NOCVB's public relations strategies and tactics will, in the opinion of the researcher, discredit the organization and the campaign since the NOCVB is not building long-term relationships with all of its publics.

#### Implications for Future Studies

The tourism industry affects the economy of not only the city of New Orleans, but the entire state. This organization has a responsibility to build mutually beneficial relationships while promoting the city. The organization also has other publics, besides state and tourism industry leaders, such as domestic and international tourists with whom they failed to build relationships.

Studies like this can help to shed light on organizations in this specific industry and help the organization and others similar in nature to understand the importance of the different types

of communication that should be employed with its publics. Doing similarly structured studies with other tourism organizations that faced recovering the industry after a natural disaster could provide more insight into the most successful way to approach the many situations the organization faced.

### Observations

Along with Hurricane Katrina recovery, which the city still faces, the United States is currently experiencing an economic downturn. The city also received recent media coverage concerning high crime rates. Lotz informed the researcher that the NOCVB is aware of these two issues and is currently taking action in order to communicate to its publics that New Orleans is safe and “the greatest free party on earth-Mardi Gras.”

Jennifer Lotz explained that, while the organization is transparent when addressing crime problems, it also has developed a strong relationship with the New Orleans Police Department. The NOPD is frequently informed by the organization when tourist volumes significantly increase during conventions and holidays. The NOPD increases its patrol in these heavily populated areas. Lotz feels that taking these preventative actions and updating tourists on the website on crime ridden areas of the city, the organization does its part to inform and keep visitors safe.

Lotz stated that the NOCVB’s message concerning the economic downturn revolves around the free and inexpensive attractions around the city. “We are an economically feasible destination and we promote that through media interviews and our web site” (J. Lotz, personal communication, March 2, 2009). Lotz is referring to the street car rides, which cost around \$1.00 as well as \$7.00 po-boys.

These strategies and tactics demonstrate that the NOCVB is reacting to current issues. It is unclear in this situation as well as in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign, whether the NOCVB



is trying to build a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship with one of its most important publics--tourists.

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## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The level of destruction from a Hurricane Katrina was like none other experienced in United States history. The study of the *Forever New Orleans* campaign has revealed that even with a plan, emotions can run high and contingencies can occur. Organizations creating similar campaigns should leave room for extraneous variables to occur in every situation, creating contingency plans in the early phases of the campaign. Organizations should also be aware of which variables will cause more accommodative strategies and tactics and which necessitate the need for advocacy.

Similar campaigns should also follow strict timelines, having both a beginning and end to the campaign, in order for the message to be received clearly and not become lost in a variety of strategies, tactics and messages throughout the years.

While these types of occurrences can only be planned for and not prevented, the researcher believes using the *Forever New Orleans* campaign as a template for an advertising campaign rather than a public relations campaign may help cities that rely heavily on tourism faced with a natural disaster. While these cities form messages, they must remember that practicing public relations involves an organization to build long-lasting relationships with all its publics, using stewardship and accommodation, not just television shows and billboards. The New Orleans tourism industry, however, continues to bask in its success claiming Mardi Gras 2009 rivaled pre-Katrina numbers in tourists and hotel reservations. The city has chosen to carry on its beloved traditions and parties throughout the hurricane seasons that come and go. The recovery from Hurricane Katrina has shown that this city, whether referred to as the “Crescent City,” “The City that Care Forgot” or “The Big Easy,” will always and forever be New Orleans.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### NOCVB Employee - Interview Guide

1. Name, position at NOCVB
2. What career choices brought you to NOCVB?
3. What do your daily duties consist of?
4. How did internal communications work at NOCVB in the immediate aftermath? Were you part of the decision making team?
5. What did your role the immediate aftermath consist of?
6. Did the Communications Department collaborate with other departments during the recovery after the storm?
7. Explain your involvement in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign.
  - a. Did you participate in the research, implementation?
  - b. Is the campaign ongoing?
8. What strategies and tactics did you use during the campaign? Explain
9. Was the *Forever New Orleans* campaign seeking to advocate or accommodate its publics?
10. Why do you think you used these types of strategies or tactics? Do you feel that the predisposed situational factors in the aftermath of the storm affected the strategies and tactics used in this campaign?
11. Do you think this campaign was a success based on these strategies and tactics? Do you credit other efforts made by the NOCVB to the success of this campaign?
12. Is there anything you think the NOCVB should have done differently?
13. Do you think other organizations would benefit from having a crisis communication plan? Why or why not?

14. Amidst the current economic crisis and the statistics published concerning New Orleans having the worst crime rates in the United States in 2008, can you explain how the is NOCVB using public relations to lure tourists into the city despite these negative impacts?

### **Affiliate-Interview Guide for John Deveney**

1. Name and current title and position
2. What career choices brought you to work in this field?
3. What do your daily duties consist of?
4. When did you collaborate with the NOCVB?
5. What were you hired on to help with?
6. How did internal communications work at NOCVB in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina? Were you part of the decision making team?
7. What did your role the immediate aftermath consist of?
8. You were involved in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign?
9. Do you know if the campaign is ongoing?
10. In your professional opinion, was the *Forever New Orleans* campaign deemed a success in the initial roll-out? Now?
11. Are there certain strategies and tactics that the NOCVB used that you think had a positive impact on the tourism industry during the *Forever New Orleans* campaign? Any that you think had a negative impact?
12. Do you think the organization sought to accommodate its publics or advocate its cause or both? If both, do you think they leaned more to one strategy than the other.



13. Do you believe that the NOCVB based its strategies and tactics in the campaign on predisposed or situational factors (i.e. the reputation of the organization, displaced employees, money, etc.) that the organization faced before and during the crises?
14. What have you learned about crises communication from working with the NOCVB after Katrina?
15. Do you think a campaign such as this one would be beneficial for other cities faced with natural disasters to use?
16. Amidst the current economic crisis and the statistics, published concerning New Orleans having the worst crime rates in the United States in 2008, do you know of how the NOCVB is using public relations to lure tourists into the city despite these negative impacts?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS

Interview with John Deveney  
(Phone Interview, February 20, 2009)

What is your current title? What career choices brought you to work specifically in this field?

My current title is President of Deveney Communications. Actually, Jinx Broussard, my mentor, had probably the heaviest hand in altering my career path. Jinx was director of communication and press secretary at the mayor's office where I chose to work after I received a fellowship when I was a junior in college.

When did you start collaborating with the NOCVB and what were you hired to help with initially?

We started working with the CVB in 2001-2002; initially we did very targeted and specialized strategic communications. Sometimes we did media relations, strategic council planning and analysis.

We started working with the CVB in 2001-2002 on a very limited basis. When the senior director of communication decided she was retiring after 30 years of service to the city, she asked us to handle the announcement of her retirement. She was a remarkable professional and wanted to make sure her departure was handled correctly. She wanted a change of pace for herself and wanted to start her own company. She recommended, to the president, for us to help with the transition. After she left, the 5 person department went down to 1 person in March 2005. We were functioning as the default department since they didn't have the department staff. Also, one of the projects we were doing at that time was the development of the hurricane emergency action plan. So, as the hurricane was coming toward us we were working on that. Then the hurricane struck. The President of the CVB asked if we could create a media center and staff it. It was located in the French quarter, which we were calling "ground zero" after the storm. We handled all media relations in the initial aftermath.

Were you involved in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign?

No, we were not. Certainly, it was built on research we've done, but by that point they had staffed up with Mary Beth Romig and Kelly Schulz. We helped when asked but other than that we had no involvement.

Is the campaign ongoing?  
I do not know.

Do you think the *Forever New Orleans* campaign was a success?

Yes. Doesn't the NOCVB say it was a success? If they say it is, then yes.

What strategies and tactics did they use that had a positive impact on the tourism industry's recovery?

The most beneficial work they did was bringing together leaders to collaborate and work together and that really sped the recovery. They brought together both leaders of city and industry to work in a collaborative mode.

Any strategies and tactics you think may have had a negative impact?

I cannot think of any.

The work that we did with CVB during and following Katrina really stands out as a career highlight. We worked with outstanding professionals and we felt very passionate and close to the project, having worked literally every waking hour on the media center and recovery. Objectively, I would say it would be tough to have anyone else take it over except Mary Beth and Kelly. They have done such a great job and I am confident in their abilities to continue the success that they've had.

Do you think the *Forever New Orleans* campaign sought to accommodate publics or advocate a cause?

I think they did both. CVB did a masterful job making sure they were bringing people to the table and that everyone's voice was heard. The organization benefited from the perspective of different council members. The PR council they formed consisted of many competitors in the tourism industry.

I think they advocated the cause more possibly because that is what their publics wanted them to do.

What have you learned from working with CVB during Katrina?

I have learned a great deal and that is the problem. It is tough for me to explain everything. I mean, it could be a book. Credibility is the most important element in crisis response. Making sure you communicate with media consistently through credible channels.

Do you think the *Forever New Orleans* campaign would be beneficial for other cities faced with natural disasters to use as a model?

Yes. For review, as a template.

Are you aware of any strategies and tactics that the NOCVB is employing during the current economic crisis and increasing media coverage of the high crime rates in the city?

Yes, I am aware of efforts. They are using sales force internet, and media relations. I'm on the outside looking in and I know they are doing a good job but can't tell you specifics on what the messages might be.

Any final words you would like to share about the organization before we complete the interview?

We are lucky to have them. They are a great organization, and do great work.

Interview with Jennifer Lotz  
(e-mail response to questions, March 2, 2009)

Name and position at NOCVB?

Jennifer Lotz, Communications Coordinator

What career choices brought you to NOCVB?

While studying Public Relations at Louisiana State University (LSU), I interned for the New Orleans CVB during the Christmas Holidays [sic]. I enjoyed my internship so much I asked to return the summer of 2007. I began working for the New Orleans CVB full time in January 2008.

What do your daily duties consist of?

Everyday at the New Orleans CVB is different, but always extremely busy. I begin my day by answering e-mails I received overnight and checking phone messages. I then check our main communications e-mail inbox.

Monitoring what the local, national and international media are saying about New Orleans is a vital part of our job. After reviewing the *Times Picayune*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and *USA Today*, I review and categorize clips of hundreds of news stories sent to us on a daily basis by our clipping service. Stories we assisted journalists with are then posted to our website under a section titled "New Orleans in the News" and copies are made for our files for use in future videos highlighting the successes of our year. I then post any press releases to the website that was distributed to us by our hospitality industry partners [sic]. I check the homepage of our website to see if any new topics should be added and I build micro-sites for the Visitors section.

Depending on the day and time of month, my further duties include providing B-roll to journalists and keeping track of our inventory, providing images to journalists, arranging interviews for Kelly Schulz, vice president of communications, and Mary Beth Romig and communicating with our national public relations firm, Weber Shandwick, of any upcoming writing or broadcast opportunities. Every Monday I distribute a newsletter for our Membership Department. Once a month I work with our Tourism and Convention Sales Departments to design and distribute for each department an electronic newsletter to thousands of Travel Agents and Meeting Planners. Every quarter we distribute a 12 page document that I help update titled the "Hospitality Industry Report." I also assist with writing press releases and advertorials and update monthly our Frequently Asked Questions, Power point [sic] presentations and "What's New in New Orleans" document.

We recently launched a new Packages and Promotions website designed specifically for media. I work with our Weber Shandwick- New York office to gather packages the hotels are offering and promotions from restaurants and attractions. Once a month they are posted to our new media website and are blasted to our media contacts. So far we have generated publicity in publications such as Time.com and the San Francisco Examiner [sic].  
([www.neworleanscvb.com/mediapackages](http://www.neworleanscvb.com/mediapackages))

Once a month I distribute to the local hospitality community a document titled "Company's Coming." This document informs them of the schedule of 500+ attendee conventions coming to town in the next month so they can properly staff for the association or corporation's arrival.

I also assist Mary Beth Romig in any way possible. This includes helping her prepare for the arrival of television and production crews and giving tours to visiting media or groups. I also assist her with matching incoming associations and corporations with local volunteering organizations for what we call "voluntourism." I also assist Mary Beth in promoting local events including sporting events and festivals.

How did internal communications work at NOCVB in the immediate aftermath?

I was not here during Hurricane Katrina.

Were you part of the decision making team?

N/A

What did your role the immediate aftermath consist of?

I was not working at the CVB during the time of Katrina

Did the Communications Department collaborate with other departments during the recovery after the storm?

As stated in questions 5, I was not working at the New Orleans CVB during the time of the storm. However, three and a half years later, we still work with other organizations within the city to make New Orleans the best it can be. The New Orleans CVB works closely with the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation to collaborate on some projects, and we have a close working relationship with the New Orleans Police Department, and of course, the New Orleans Morial Convention Center. The New Orleans CVB is a member-based organization with over 1,000 members. In the communications department, we work with our members to host journalist and generate news stories about their organization and New Orleans. This in turn not only benefits our members, but the city of New Orleans as a whole.

Explain your involvement in the *Forever New Orleans* campaign.

The *Forever New Orleans* Ad Campaign is a campaign we use every day. I use the campaign to explain the essence of New Orleans to potential customers as well as through promotional efforts. *Forever New Orleans* is used in print advertisement and as a logo to brand our organization.

Did you participate in the research, implementation?

No

Is the campaign ongoing?

Yes, it is still a vital part of our branding. While we sometimes use our corporate logo, the *Forever New Orleans* logo is still used to identify the New Orleans CVB.

What strategies and tactics did you use during the campaign? Explain

N/A

Was the *Forever New Orleans* campaign seeking to advocate or accommodate its publics?

I would say both. The *Forever New Orleans* campaign advocated change in perception while accommodating locals and those with an affinity for New Orleans. In other words, following Hurricane Katrina there was a misperception that New Orleans had changed and a fear that the culture was swept away in the floods. The *Forever New Orleans* campaign communicated to the world that New Orleans was an authentic place in the past, it is unique now and it forever will be this way. At the same time, I believe the phrase stirs the emotions of locals and those who understand that New Orleans is back and better than ever.

Why do you think you used these types of strategies or tactics? Do you feel that the predisposed situational factors in the aftermath of the storm affected the strategies and tactics used in this campaign?

As stated in the previous question, I think the phrase was chosen because it sums up the emotions of those that love New Orleans. New Orleans is a place like no other in the world, because of the way the city makes you feel while you are here and when you leave. *Forever New Orleans* ensured past and potential visitors that the city they love would remain the same no matter what. I think emotions are a powerful factor in discretionary decision making, especially when it comes to travel.

I definitely believe the predisposed situational factors in the aftermath of Katrina affected how we communicated to the world. Promoting tourism post-Katrina is sometimes an emotional conflict for us as communications professionals. We often describe New Orleans as a “tale of two cities.” While the outlying areas of New Orleans are still struggling to recover to this day, the French Quarter was relatively unaffected. We needed the *Forever New Orleans* campaign to help people eliminate the horrible pictures they saw on their TVs and realize that the parts of the city they loved so much looked like the same New Orleans. However, we do recognize that there are people still struggling, but with tourism being our number one industry and employing over 70,000 people, coming to visit New Orleans helps those still struggling to come home.

Do you think this campaign was a success based on these strategies and tactics? Do you credit other efforts made by the NOCVB to the success of this campaign?

I definitely believe this campaign is successful. I drive around town and see *Forever New Orleans* bumper stickers on local cars. I see it in the 7.1 million visitors we hosted in 2007. Success is seen in a great Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) annual

meeting where 3,000 of the world's top meeting planners thoroughly enjoyed New Orleans. These are people who created approximately \$40 billion in business a year. Success was seen in this year's Mardi Gras where our attendance and hotel occupancy rates rivaled 2005 pre-Katrina numbers. Everything from the BCS National Championship, NBA All-Star, record-breaking French Quarter and Jazz Festivals and hosting seven back to back city-wide conventions in the summer of 2009 constitute that the *Forever New Orleans* campaign has been and continues to be a success.

Although I think *Forever New Orleans* contributes to the successes we experience, I think above all the camaraderie within all departments of the CVB as well as the partnerships among several New Orleans entities contributes to the success. We are blessed to have convention and tourism sales teams that are so dedicated to the city and continue to excel in booking business. From a communications standpoint, I think it is the quality articles generated by the CVB and members of the CVB that has changed perception. The festivals, conventions and events mentioned above also have helped put New Orleans tourism back on the map.

Is there anything you think the NOCVB should have done differently?

The New Orleans CVB along with the City of New Orleans recognized after Katrina that there needed to be a plan for the future. In September 2008, Hurricane Gustav tested this plan and proved to be extremely successful. The communications among all major tourism entities in the city and state of Louisiana was superb. Gustav threatened New Orleans during a major festival, Southern Decadence Festival, a celebration attended by approximately 100,000 people. All visitors were safely evacuated from the city. There was no blue print for Katrina and the recovery process afterwards, but the New Orleans CVB and city of New Orleans proved to learn from the past to make the future safer for everyone.

Do you think other organizations would benefit from having a crisis communication plan? Why or why not?

Absolutely, and I think other cities and organizations learned from Katrina, and as stated above, we benefited from a crisis communications plan as well. One of the most important things an organization does is communicate to its publics. For Hurricane Gustav, New Orleans set up a website that was updated several times a day by our President and CEO as well as the Director and Vice President of Communications [sic]. A representative from the CVB was present at every press conference leading up to the storm. A trust in New Orleans was established this way. The International media recognized New Orleans' preparedness and so has the convention industry. This summer, a time that is normally slow for New Orleans' convention industry, seven back to back city-wide conventions will take place in June and July. I believe this is in part due to the trust that is established that should something happen during hurricane season; New Orleans will ensure the safety of all.

Amidst the current economic crisis and the statistics published concerning New Orleans having the worst crime rates in the United States in 2008, can you explain how the NOCVB using public relations to lure tourists into the city despite these negative impacts?

I think the most important “tactic” is honesty. Crime has presented us with a difficult situation, but first we want all of our visitors to be safe. We recognize that New Orleans has crime issues, but we also caution our visitors to exercise caution as they would in any major U.S. city. We also have an established professional relationship with the NOPD. We communicate with them our convention calendar and work with them to ensure the safety of visitors and convention-goers.

During these tough economic times, New Orleans is fortunate because we are not seen as a luxury destination. We are an economically feasible destination and we promote that through interviews and our website. New Orleans hosted “the greatest free party on earth,” Mardi Gras, and is home to \$7 po-boys and \$1.25 streetcar rides. We also have 150 more restaurants open in New Orleans than we had pre-Katrina. While we are not at pre-Katrina levels, we are one of the only U.S. destinations forecasting economic growth in 2009. I think our visitors and potential visitors decide New Orleans because they know they can get a bang for their buck.



## VITA

Blair Alexis Broussard is a native of Carencro, Louisiana. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in public relations from University of Louisiana at Lafayette in May, 2007. Blair understood the great importance of education from an early age. Her competitive nature in academics lead her to pursue a post-graduate degree immediately after receiving her bachelor's degree. She decided to travel an hour away from home and accept a position with Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication Graduate program.

Preceding and throughout the program, Blair's research interests included public relations strategies and tactics and other communication efforts of the higher education system and tourism industry of Louisiana. Blair's interest in tourism efforts of the state was elevated after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and she became curious in how the city she loves would recover.

Blair's involvement with public relations within the higher education realm developed before even entering graduate school. She served as an intern at the UL Lafayette Alumni Association and became greatly involved in its communication efforts. She now serves as a communications graduate assistant at the University of Louisiana System office. The system governs eight regional universities across the state and facilitates over 80,000 students.

Following graduation Blair hopes to continue her career in higher education communication. She may, in the distant future, plan to pursue her doctorate degree in higher education administration to further her career in higher education.