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## **Hollywood publicity agent earning "15 minutes"**

By Bob Tourtellotte

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Howard Bragman is a Hollywood spin doctor with a message for everyday Joes and Josephines -- shape your public image.

Bragman has spent more than three decades in public relations, much of it in Hollywood. In his new book, "Where's My Fifteen Minutes," he talks about image sculpting by celebrities ranging from Angelina Jolie to tabloid headliner Larry Birkhead.

Bragman says that whether somebody owns a small business, is a professional like a doctor or lawyer, wants to be a community activist or head of a local organization, they need to communicate who they are before someone else does.

"It's the same as in Hollywood or Washington. If you don't define yourself, someone else is going to define you. And you're not going to be as happy with the way they do it," he said, when speaking to Reuters about his new book:

Q: This is not a tell-all about your days in Hollywood, but is really sort of a "how-to" type of book. Who is it for?

A: "Anybody who wants to go to the next level, which is a huge group of people -- people who want to keep their jobs, people who want a new job, people who have a business and feel the tightening of the economy and want to maximize their money, people who want to be an activist of some kind, cleaning up the environment or affecting change."

Q: The book isn't about how to write press releases, but about how people think of society at large and, by extension, their place in it. Why did you take that broad approach?

A: "First of all, there are a lot of good books about how to write a press release and how to do the specifics.

I want people to watch a talk show and understand the answers that are given. I want them to watch "Entertainment Tonight" and understand why celebrities are giving the interviews they are giving and how to read between the lines

I also wanted to have a book that was enjoyable. It's more an empowering and motivational book than anything, and I've gone out of my way to throw some nice juicy Hollywood stories, from Isaiah Washington to Paula Abdul, to others."

Q: You write about social networking sites and personal searches on Google and how people need to be aware that even the most private person now has a public profile.

A: "And if you are not shaping your image, you should be. You can't just let it happen. That's not how you succeed in normal times, and in tough times it's more important than ever. I think, interestingly, the skills for doing a good job interview are the same for doing a good TV interview."

Q: But you work in Hollywood, and you write that people often come to you for the wrong reason, fame, when what they should really want is recognition. What is the difference?

A: "When people come talk to me and say, 'I want to be famous.' I say, 'No you don't. You want recognition.' Fame is the by-product of recognition. Recognition means that you've done something well and people say you are great at your job. What fame means? Fame is merely you walking down the street and people saying 'Look, it's so-and-so.' I can tell you from clients, fame can be nice sometimes when you want a good table, but when you have a bad waiter or waitress and you want to leave a bad tip, it's not so good. When you're in the hospital and the National Enquirer knows your test results before you get them from your doctor, it's not so much fun."

Q: You write about not wanting to be recognized for something negative, but for building a positive image.

A: "When people mention your name, you want them to say, 'wow you're really cool'. Angelina Jolie is obviously really famous, but more important she is recognized for good work she does in this world. She gets it. Madonna is one of the geniuses of managing her public image. She manages to stay relevant. And what does she do with that? She uses it to change the world. Early on she talked about AIDS and HIV and now she talks about adoption and issues in Africa. If you can't take the fame somewhere, it's just a pain in the butt."

Q: But often what you say is counter to that old public relations saying, "there's no such thing as bad publicity."

A: "In the book I have the 10 commandments of PR and one is, 'all press is not good press' and let me just tell you if you've taken Naomi Campbell to court or been at Isaiah Washington's side or spoken with Monica Lewinsky and her family or been in an interview with Ed McMahon when he's trying to save his house, there is such a thing as bad press. It hurts emotionally, it hurts your dignity, it hurts financially, and it hurts in many, many, many ways."