



Communicating to the Consumer: Managing Public Outrage

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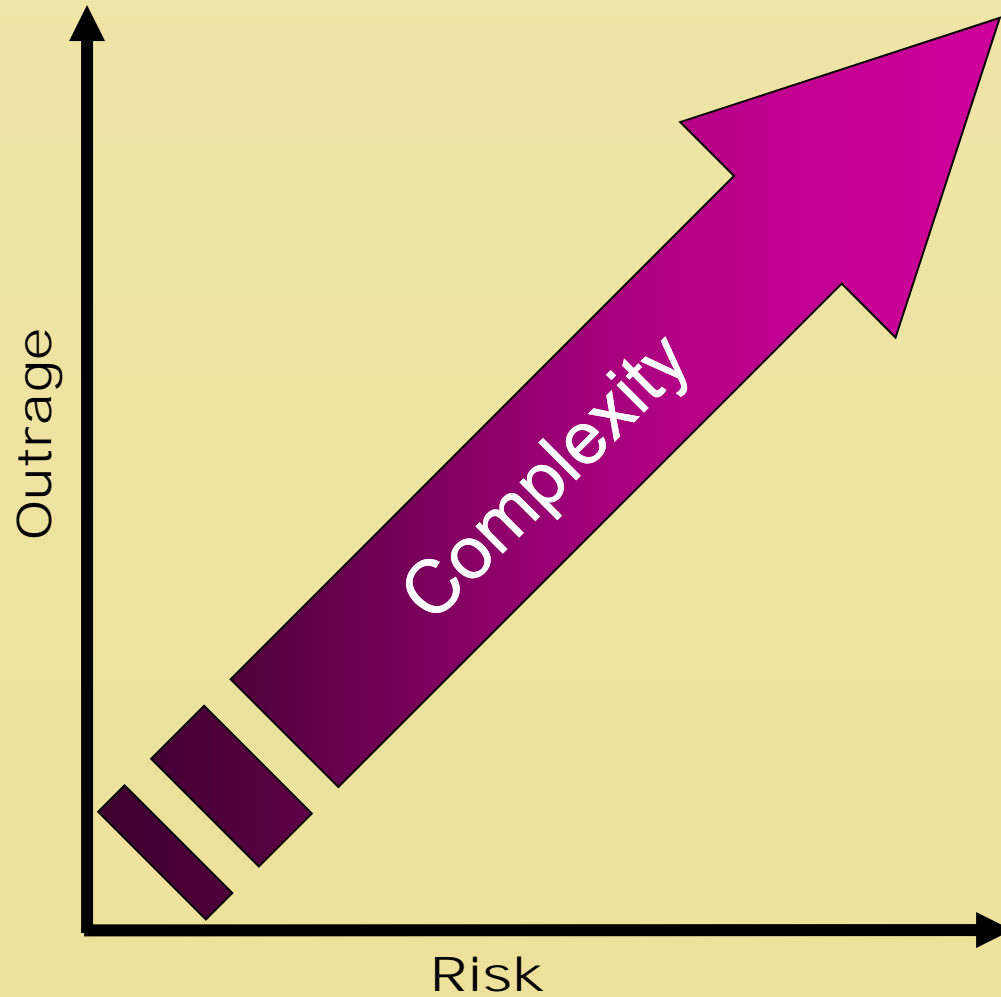
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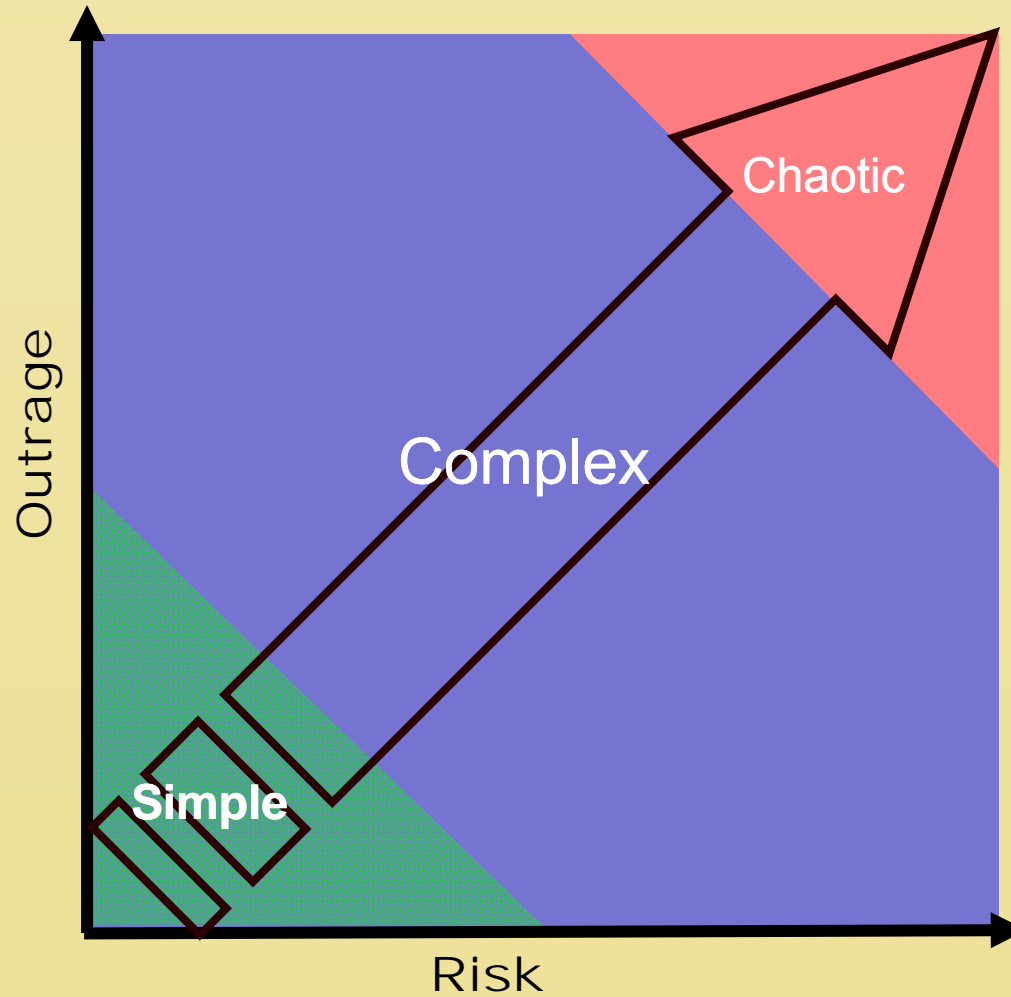


The Model



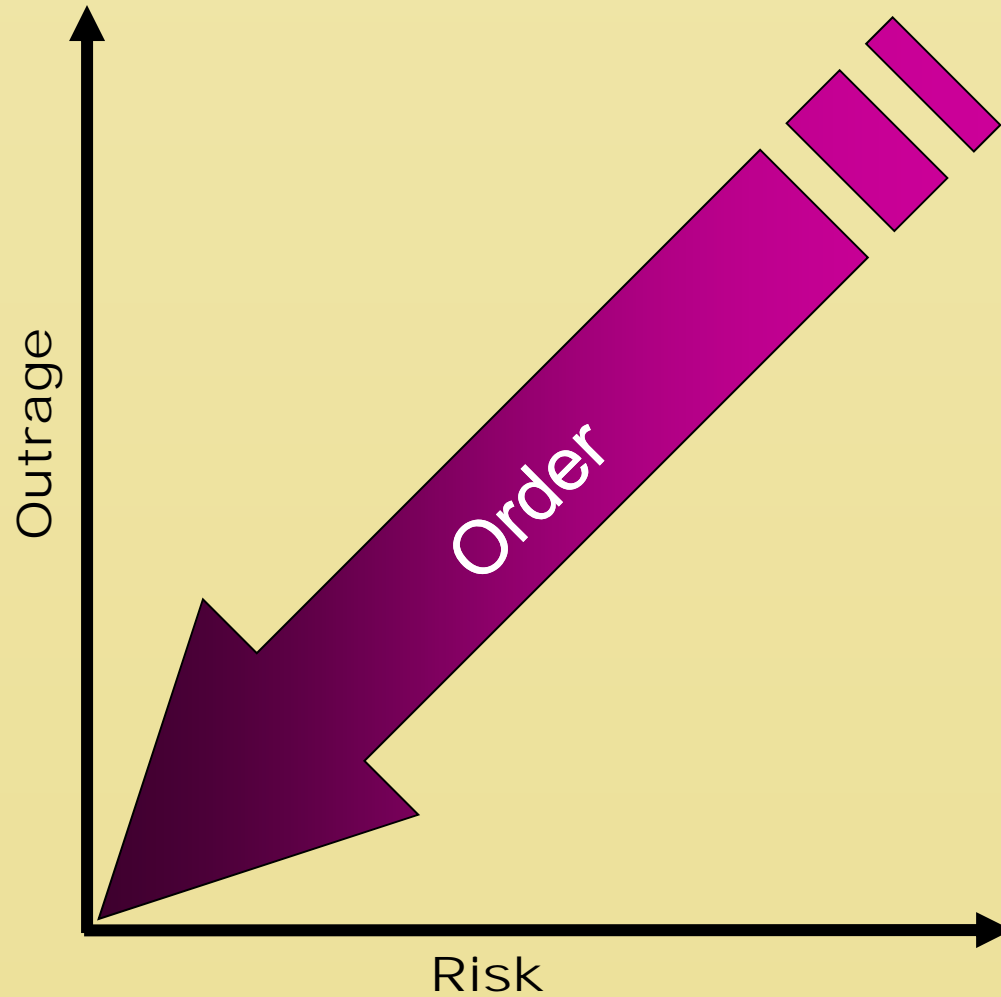


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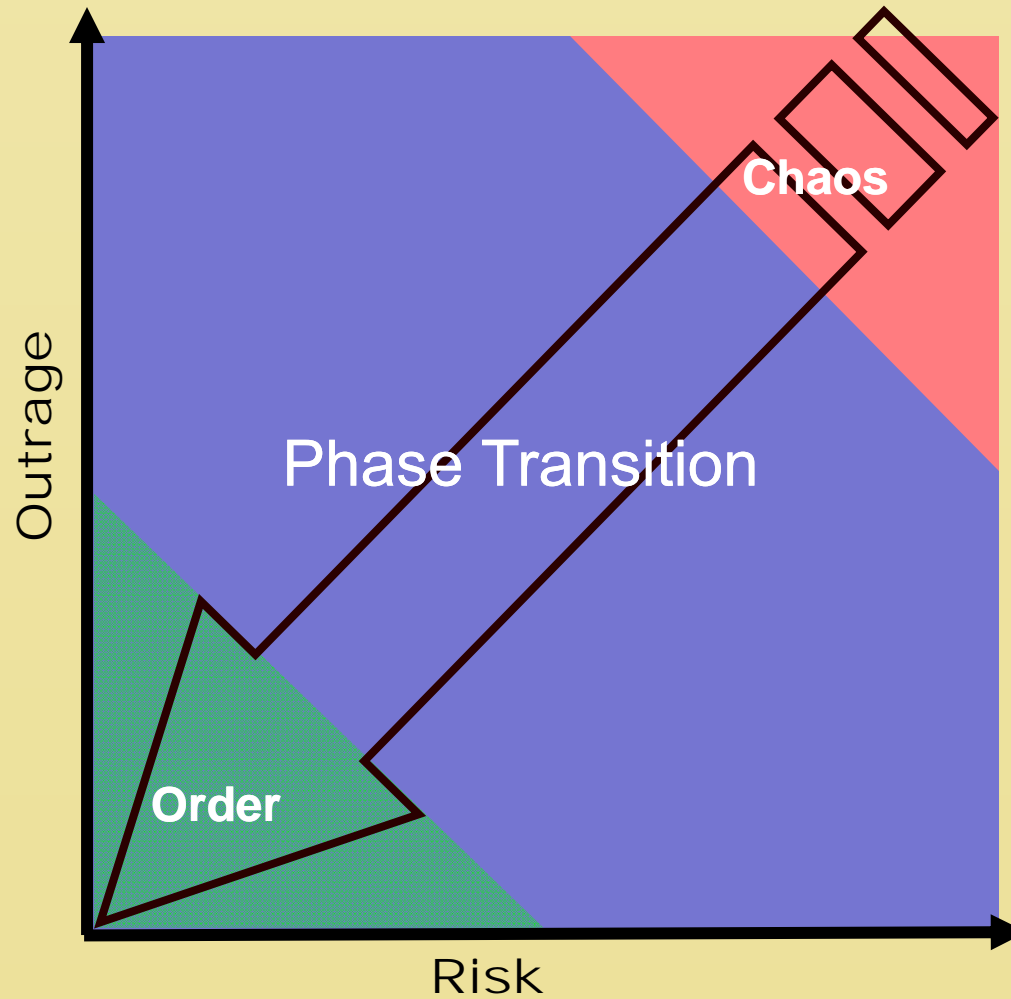


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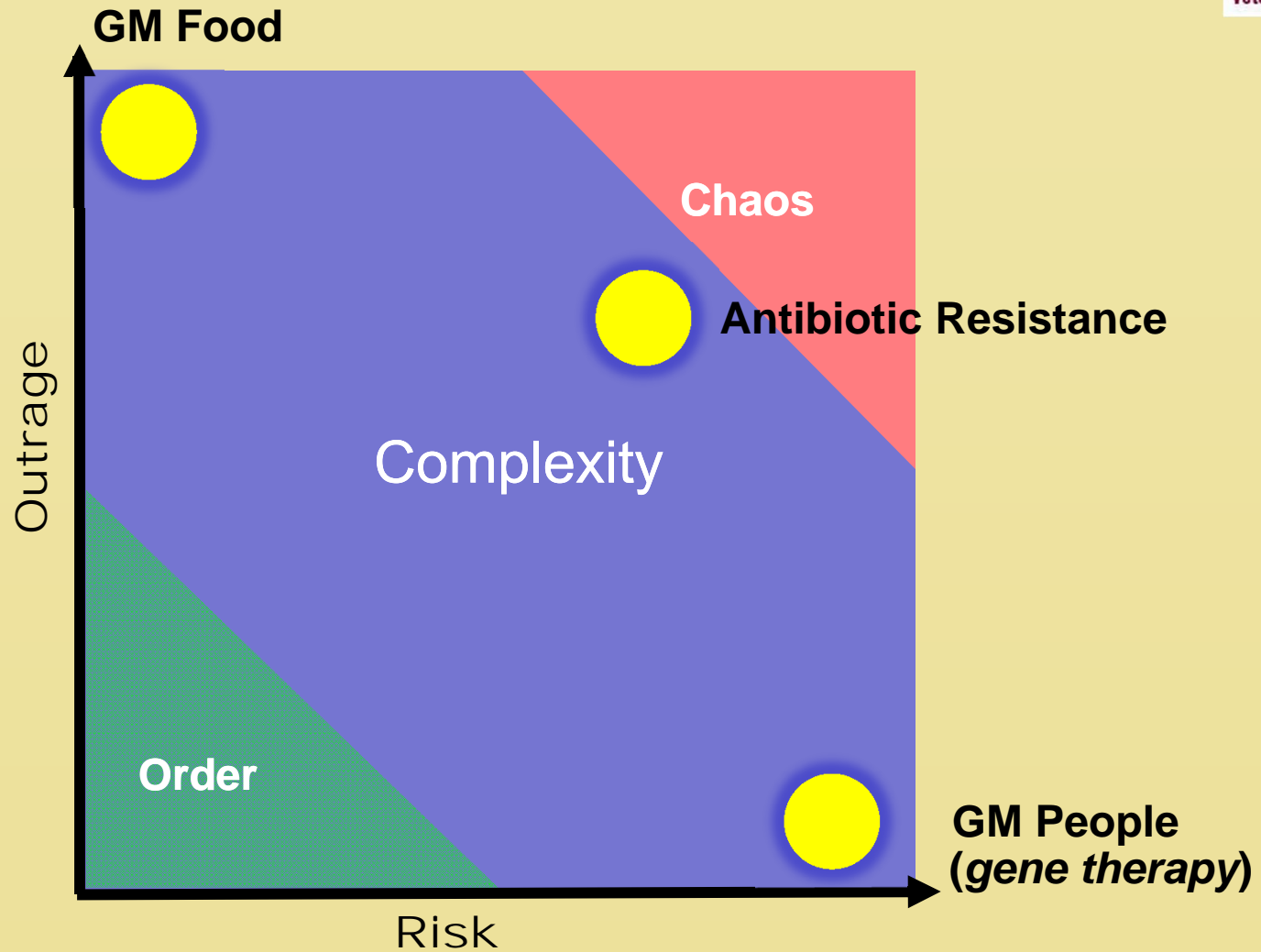


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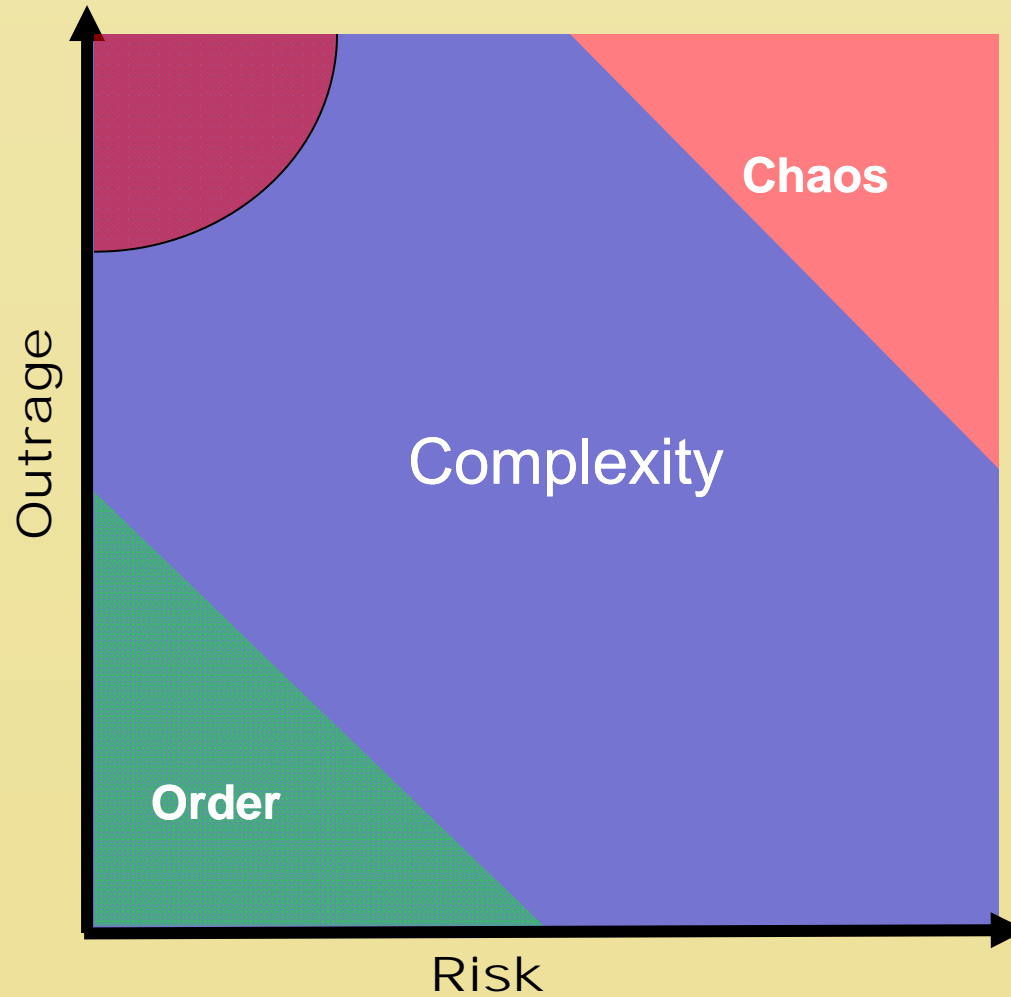


The Model





The Model





Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- The Progression of Controversy - **Stage 1**
 - Controversy begins when some group complains that something is dangerous
 - You investigate the hazard and determine that it is low so you ignore the complainers
 - People do not respond well to being ignored. They get more angry, more frightened. They also gain more momentum: more members, contributions, media coverage

[†]From Peter Sandman



Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- The Progression of Controversy - **Stage 2**
 - Having failed to ignore your critics into oblivion, you try to bury them in the data. You collect all the evidence you can that you're right and they're fools, and you dump it all on them in the hope that it will make them happy
 - This works about as well on the job as it would at home. People are not pleased to be called fools. They get more angry and more frightened, more momentum and more power ... and now you're in the third stage.

[†]From Peter Sandman



Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- The Progression of Controversy - **Stage 3**
 - Having failed to ignore them into oblivion, having failed to bury them in the data, you now look for a way to attack their motives
 - If they're professionals you call them mercenaries
 - if they're amateurs you call them ignorant
 - If they're men you call them macho
 - If they're women you call them hysterical
 - People don't like having their motives attacked. Once again, anger, fear, momentum, and power escalate

[†]From Peter Sandman



Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- The Progression of Controversy - **Stage 4**
 - You get a telephone call from top management. “This is getting serious,” you are told. “These people used to be just a minor irritant. But now Congress is asking awkward questions, newspapers are running embarrassing stories, the Administration, who we thought was on our side, is putting some distance between us and them. I don’t care what you have to do, get these people off our backs!”

[†]From Peter Sandman



Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- The Progression of Controversy - **Stage 5**
 - And so the government ends up spending \$30 million on research to assess a hazard that you decided at Stage 1 was too trivial to bother with

[†]From Peter Sandman



Risk = Hazard + Outrage[†]



- Would a Simple Apology Suffice?
 - And that doesn't work either. Your problem was an outrage problem, not a hazard problem.
 - Your critics needed an apology and an independent advisory panel, not a \$30 million research program
 - They're still outraged. The only change is now you also are outraged, because you've just spent \$30 million on a research program of questionable value

[†]From Peter Sandman



Managing Outrage



- In a contest between emotion and reason, emotion usually wins
- Sustaining your position in the face of public outrage requires extraordinary political will, which unfortunately rests with your superiors
- So your best hope is to prevent outrage from igniting in the first place



Managing Outrage



- Wrong starting premise
 - If the public knew as much about the risk as we do, they would come around to our way of thinking
- Right starting premise
 - What does the public know
 - What is fueling their outrage
 - What does the public want to know



Common Mistakes[†]



- Deciding what the public needs to know before determining what they already know and want to know more about
- Not being clear on objectives and the messages most likely to achieve
- Not knowing enough about the external information environment -- content and quantity of media and commercial stories
- Not evaluating consumer understanding of messages prior to use and behavioral effectiveness following use

[†]From Nancy Ostrove



Managing Outrage[†]



- Some advice...
 - Pay attention to general risk perception factors
 - Don't assume you know what audiences need – whenever possible, ask them
 - Keep credibility high – enlist higher credibility groups if necessary
 - Set objectives, pre-test to inform messaging, and evaluate effectiveness whenever possible
 - Consider audience presentation needs – don't data dump on the public (especially if information is very technical)

[†]From Nancy Ostrove



Managing Outrage



- Plan ahead
 - Often we know about future regulatory decisions likely to incite outrage years before the decision will be made
 - rbST
 - Genetically modified crops
 - Genetically modified animals
 - Animal Clones
 - Irradiation



Managing Outrage



- Softening up
 - New technologies are often viewed as unnatural and scary when the concept is first introduced
 - Over time with enough opportunities for public input and information sharing, anxiety tends to decline as the new technology starts to become familiar
 - Knowing that a regulatory decision is a long way off dampens outrage and opens a window for rational discourse to take place



Managing Outrage



- Start by understanding the consumer's perspective
 - Conduct consumer surveys
 - Conduct focus groups
- Build trust and credibility
 - Listen to consumer concerns and acknowledge them
 - Align with other trusted organizations



Managing Outrage



- Hold public meetings to solicit input and put a face on a faceless bureaucracy
- Participate in meetings organized by other government and nongovernmental organizations
- Be as transparent as legally allowable about the decision-making process



Managing Outrage



- Publish pre-decisional results of research studies in scientific journals to gain support of the scientific community
- Respond swiftly to misinformation whether intentional or unintentional
- Stay ahead of your critics
- Compromise where possible



Managing Outrage



- Establish post-decisional risk management programs
 - rbST
 - 6 month moratorium
 - Post-approval monitoring program
 - Animal clones
 - National registry (voluntary)
 - No animal clones in the food supply
 - Database of animal health problems



Outrageous Questions?