
MEASURING PR: OUTCOMES

- WHAT IMPACT IS THE COMMUNICATION HAVING? -

One critical aim of PR is to influence an environment to achieve change. The perception is that measurement of PR is either not possible or simply too difficult. Not so. Measurement of PR is alive and well - especially internationally - and many organisations use it.

'Outputs' measure the effectiveness of the work done. It enables an analysis of those reached by the communication. It is possible to track whether the right message was conveyed. And the cost effectiveness of the communication can be measured. Many organisations routinely set-up procedures internally - or from their agency - to measure outputs.

This is relatively easy to do because output measurement can be done internally by those handling the communication. And for organisations that are not doing any measurement at all it can be a real step forward, providing useful benchmarking information.

But measuring 'Outcomes' is what the savvy organisation really wants to know. The 'Outcomes' from PR activity that organisation normally seek to measure are:

- Did we create greater awareness (i.e. what new information was received)?
- Did our audience comprehend what we were communicating (i.e. did their level of understanding increase from what it was before)?
- Did we change attitudes (i.e. what do they believe and feel that they didn't before we began communication)?
- Did our target audience change their behaviour as a result of our communication (i.e. what did they actually do that was different from before)?

The key to successful measurement is to have clear goals that can be measured. Setting goals is a task that not only needs careful consideration, but also 'buy-in' from management.

It requires:

- A clear definition of who you are trying to reach.
- Knowledge about the existing levels of audience awareness, comprehension, attitudes and behaviour.
- An agreement on how much you are trying to change the audience - by a small amount or in a radical way.
- A timetable to achieve the changes that is acceptable to management.

The research techniques for measuring outcomes are similar to those used in marketing programmes including:

- focus groups
- exit interviews post events
- omnibus surveys
- full quantitative surveys

However it's also possible to include more quantifiable techniques e.g.: how many attended an event, or took an action that was directly linked to the programme,

increase in the number of time a service was used, increase in activities by target audiences as they relate to the project.

In India, measurement of 'Outcomes' is not as widespread as overseas, largely because the cost of measuring outcomes is often too high relative to the cost of the PR programme. Also within marketing, research is heavily weighted towards advertising-led market research. But the often-heard criticism that PR can't be measured simply doesn't hold water any more. It can. The issue is whether those commissioning PR want to spend the additional funds doing it.

Measuring PR Outputs - the first essential step

Everyone has to justify their actions. And every department in a corporation has to justify its contribution to business results. For many departments this is quite simple, because their role is clearly defined and their contribution equally obvious.

And that's one of the problems facing the measurement of PR activities. Too few people in the organisation understand what it is that PR is trying to achieve. It can also be argued that many PR people themselves don't question what they are trying to achieve and therefore face difficulties in measuring what they do. For some, it's like the person in the exhibition booth who reports that it was a great exhibition because they got rid of all their brochures.

'MEASUREMENT OF PR ESSENTIALLY FALLS INTO THREE CATEGORIES'

1. **Outputs** - measuring the effectiveness of the work done. Who did we reach? Did it convey the right messages? Was it done cost efficiently?
2. **Outcomes** - measuring changes resulting from our communication. Did we create greater awareness? Did we change attitudes? Did our target audience change their behaviour?
3. **Business results** - how did the PR help the organisation achieve its business objectives?

Measurement is currently a hot topic in the US where there is a whole industry of individuals and firms selling measurement tools - and most of them relate to measurement of outputs. Some are selling science and others, technology. Others still are forming alliances between science and technology, driven by a need to be able to deliver research with analysis rather than just one or the other. But while these many vendors are competing with each other over whose science or technology is the best, a core argument about how measurement results should be presented remains largely unaddressed.

While some say it's Share of Voice, others are saying it should be Share of Discussion (Share of Voice plus tonality). And how do you present the findings? Compounding this is the fact that top management is used to dealing in reports that give \$ values. This level of management in general, and particularly marketing executives, would be happy to see a report expressed in terms of Advertising Equivalents (AVE). But AVEs have been frowned upon for years within the PR industry.

Measuring PR success – AVEs rejected

Measuring PR 'value' on the basis of advertising value equivalents was in vogue a few years back. It was something product and brand managers in particular could relate to; and more often than not it showed a favourable comparison between fee charged and coverage obtained.

But it's been on shaky grounds for some time and now most PR and advertising bodies reject the use of Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs) in measuring editorial success. AVEs measure the space generated by PR editorial in a publication, and calculate how much that space would cost in advertising rates.

Here's some differences between editorial and advertising space:

<i>Editorial</i>	<i>Advertising</i>
<i>Appears only if the media feels it is 'newsworthy' or relevant to its audience</i>	<i>Is paid for and carefully placed in selectively targeted media</i>
<i>The original message may be changed or added to as part of the editorial process</i>	<i>Says exactly what the company wants to say</i>
<i>Is viewed by the readers as the opinion of the media or journalist</i>	<i>Is recognised by the reader as paid-for</i>
<i>May be used in a wide variety of media beyond the initial media the material is sent to</i>	<i>Is restricted to the media paid for</i>

Measurement of outputs is a discipline that should be an integral part of every PR programme. And setting up and running a measurement system that is attuned to a specific company, product or issue is not difficult.

Here is a range of Media Output measurement options to consider:

- Impressions – Readership (as opposed to circulation) of clips
- Value - the equivalent advertising value of media coverage
- Cost - the cost per media impression or the cost per thousand of a campaign
- Frequency - number of times exposure is gained
- Reach – the degree of coverage across target audiences
- Prominence - how and where the coverage occurred within specific media
- Message delivery – did the story deliver specific pre-determined messages?
- Tone – was the story positive, neutral or negative?
- Share of Ink - total amount of coverage devoted to a topic
- Share of Voice - percentage of coverage devoted to a client or product compared with competitors.

In addition there is a range of other measurement criteria than can be applied to other activities in a programme. For example:

- Functions. How many attended? What was the ratio of acceptances to total invitations? What was the acceptance rate by type of invitee? What was the cost per attendee?
- Web sites. How many accessed the web site as a result of communication? What sections did they go to? How long did they stay?

A mix of measurement techniques can be devised for each situation. However the criteria by which measurement is undertaken can vary widely. Multinationals typically have their own template in place – but it's not uncommon for variations to reflect the local environment.

Actual measurement requires a range of tools and/or disciplines. Some are simple and others more sophisticated. Some you can easily do yourself and others may need to be bought in. And in some instances you may only need external advice at the beginning and end of the project, or your annual programme.

However the key to successful measurement is in the advance preparation. Communication professionals need to debate and discuss the various methodologies with those they report to so that meaningful objectives can be set.

Many executives will be surprised how measurable PR output can be. And they may be even more pleasantly surprised if the communications professional not only volunteers this measurement, but also comes with a carefully constructed approach to it.

NEW MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES LINK SALES DIRECTLY TO PR

Five years ago marketing people were pressuring for better PR measurement. Now there are claims that new PR media measurement techniques can show a direct link between PR and sales results. It's evidence of just how far PR measurement has come in such a short time. Advances in PR measurement techniques are helping support increases in PR budgets in the marketing arena, sometimes at the expense of advertising.

Most PR measurement is focused around its media generation role. Typically most measurement seeks to analyse media exposure – which is similar to the traditional advertising approach that marketing and brand managers are familiar, and comfortable, with.

First Level – Who did we reach? The most fundamental – and least costly media measurement – is to evaluate the impact of PR outputs – measuring the effectiveness of the work done. Typically this measurement will cover:

- media reach – number of media, number of readers?
- message delivery – did the story deliver the pre-determined messages,
- what was the tone?

The advantage of this is that helps tell the organisation using PR whether the communication of their messages is reaching the desired target audiences. The

disadvantage is that it is only measuring the organisation's communication and taking no account of competitors.

Second Level – How do we compare? The second level of media measurement is the equivalent of the traditional advertising 'share of voice' approach. This tracks the organisation and its competitors. It provides the advantage of knowing how much media coverage and of what type it obtained relative to its competitors. It is more costly, and time consuming, than the first level, but not markedly so.

In a very competitive marketing environment, Measuring share of voice is essential for organisations serious about their PR. Combined with the first level it provides most organisations with a good evaluation tool.

Third Level – How does media exposure relate to sales? Increasingly the measurement techniques at the second level are being analysed on a different basis – their correlation with sales patterns. And this has been re-named by some as '**Share of Discussion**'.

The hypothesis about Share of Discussion is that if:

- a) PR can increase the amount of public (principally media driven) discussion about a topic, and
- b) It can gain the majority share (or dominance) for the organization or product or issue, then
- c) It is likely that there will be a consequent increase in sales for that product/competitor after a period of time.

A US organisation – PRTrak – has produced several case studies that directly – and scientifically – provide a link between peak periods of discussion, and competitor domination of these, to increased sales. However the time lapse between activity and action varies according to the type of product or service.

PRTraks analysis of some points revealed the following:

- Menopause therapy - per capita prescriptions rose and fell according to the level of public discussion. In this instance the prescription increases came 11 weeks behind the peak period of discussion.
- Nutritional product – a tracking study showed a clear correlation between public discussion and sales. As discussion increased, sales increased – and conversely.
- B2B software product – a study showed a clear correlation between share of discussion for the company and the percentage of sales that resulted from each face-to-face call.
- College admissions – a New England college showed that parental preference, and its competitive position, was influenced by all forms of discussion about it compared to its competitors.

The method of analysing public discussion, and the relative weightage between the parties, involves distinguishing between positive, neutral and negative mentions in order to arrive at each competitors 'net favourable media value' and then their final 'share of discussion'.

It must be recognised that these studies are related to unpaid media coverage i.e. that which is generated through PR. It supports other studies that report that consumers are much more influenced by editorial comment and coverage, which they perceive as being independent and credible.

If the hypothesis works, then (for example), if mobile phones are very much an item of discussion in the media, the mobile phone brand, which gains the greatest exposure, stands to reap the greatest sales benefit.

Of course, it may be argued that marketers have always intuitively known this anyway. However, what makes this different is that this is showing the potency of unpaid media exposure - and that's PR. If unpaid media is so important, what marketer is able to take the risk of allowing a competitor to get a competitive advantage in this space?

PR MEASUREMENT: ASSESSING MEDIA COVERAGE

Public relations is a lot more than simply gaining media coverage; but this is often a core element of a PR programme, so it's important to know if your media relations efforts are effective.

As you commence a new financial year, here are five questions you should be asking to determine whether your media relations efforts are effective.

Are we targeting the media that matters most?

All media are not equal in value for delivering your message, nor are the media with the biggest circulation necessarily the best for you. The credibility of the publication needs to be assessed, as does its ability to reach your target audiences..

Most organisations define several media categories as integral to reaching their target audiences, eg: trade/retailer, suppliers, business, consumer, or financial. At the start of the year, it pays to categorise and prioritise media by type or tier. If you set goals for ideal exposure sought you will be able to track your performance and demonstrate your results.

What is the quality of the coverage we are achieving?

Many simply rate media by circulation. That's a start - but all it really tells you is how many people bought the publication.

Measuring by impressions goes further. It measures how many people are potentially exposed to your messages. This delves into statistics usually provided by the media, such as figures of actual readers, listeners and viewers. It also takes into account factors such as:

- Salience
- Branded images
- Branded headlines
- Placement
- Tonality (positive, negative or neutral)
- Spokesperson quotes

Done properly, measurement by impressions can start to build a strong case showing how many people your media campaign is actually reaching and whether it is

conveying the messages you seek. For example, the Return on Impressions model allows users to ascertain the number of people likely to fulfil the desired behaviour (i.e. buy your product, etc) based on readership figures of publications featuring coverage of your organisation/brand/product.

Is our coverage on-message?

You put so much effort into developing key messages for your organisation, brands or products, but if the media coverage you generate doesn't contain these messages, it has been a wasted opportunity.

To measure the effectiveness of your messaging delivery it is essential to set up an evaluation system. This is also a useful tool for measuring the media's perception of your organisation. If you are constantly writing material with the correct messages, but it is not being reflected in your media coverage it could indicate there are some issues or discrepancies in the media's perception of your organisation or its products or services.

Are we getting a return for our media relations investment?

If you have a major campaign involving launch costs – and perhaps a PR agency – you may wish to measure the cost related to the outputs.

You can measure by **cost-per-impression**. This involves calculating the favourable impressions and dividing by the cost of the campaign to come up with a cost-per-impression. You can also measure by **cost-per-message**. This involves an analysis of the media coverage to determine how many of your key messages were delivered. By dividing this by the cost of the project or campaign you arrive at a cost per message.

These are not a true measurement of ROI (Return On Investment) but they provide a statistical basis on which to make a judgement. They can be particularly useful in comparing one campaign against another.

But what about our share of discussion?

Whilst looking at the quality and reach of your own media coverage is an important indicator, you also need to consider it in relation to that of your competitors. You need to duplicate the measurements that you perform for your own organisation for each of your competitors; the only exception is message delivery, because you are not privy to their key messages.

This should be your ultimate test. If your organisation has 20 percent market share and you get 40 percent share of discussion you are performing well. But if your organisation has 40 percent market share and you are getting only 20 percent share of discussion you have a problem! Common measures of share of discussion are **Share of Voice (circulation) and Share of Ink (quantity)**.

The days have gone when media relations was all about how many releases were sent out with no regard to measuring results. Today, the pressure is on for everyone to be more accountable. Spending more time (and budget) on measurement is simply part of the process.

But there is a good side to it. The smart operators will see the introduction of measurement as a way to obtain better management buy-in to PR. Measurement can ensure PR is seen as a profit centre, as opposed to a cost centre. In times of financial pressures, PR budgets are often among the first to go. By being more accountable and providing management with statistical results, you are better able to protect the position of PR as a necessary component of the marketing mix – not just a luxury for when times are good.

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