

## Tip Sheet: Embracing The Clarity Of Measurement

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Deliver significant media awareness...cut through the frenzied media clutter in a fun and buzz-worthy way...deliver media splash and an emotional connection. Huh? If you're like most executives funding PR programs, you will have no idea what these objectives mean or how their performance will be proven. But if you're like many PR people, you are padding important client communication with similarly unnecessary and often meaningless words and phrases. And what's more, these examples were lifted from awards submissions to one of the profession's most prestigious competitions. In other words, if "the best of the best" are incomprehensible, what about the thousands of programs not considered award-worthy to begin with?

Most of the public relations research and evaluation being undertaken today is done for two reasons: first, to provide the feedback that's required to continually improve PR performance, and, second, to demonstrate the value of PR to those who impact PR funding and decision-making. Unfortunately, when we choose to substitute vague jargon instead of clear, concise communication, neither goal is achieved. Instead, let us communicate more clearly to give our clients and staff a reason to listen.

What follows are four proven tips to help you succinctly communicate your objectives, your performance and your accomplishments:

Stop pretending. The businesspeople who fund PR programs whom I know recognize that PR multipliers are baseless; they distinguish that PR performance and advertising equivalencies are apples and oranges; they know that clip volume isn't the primary goal...and so on. And the dirty little secret is that most PR people know it, too. These fake measures may work up to a point, but eventually somebody figures it out, and when they do, things can become very unpleasant very quickly.

Instead, work with your PR team and your clients (whether they are internal or external) to establish a measurement system that accurately reflects PR's unique value and return on investment. Use common language so that everyone benefits during the objectives-setting, strategy development and evaluation stages.

Be brave. One agency executive told me that he was being forced to use circulation/audience multipliers because the client's last agency used them and, as the new agency, improvement had to be shown.

If PR is going to evolve as we all agree that it should, we must educate our clients to the advantages of verifiable measurement. We must show courage by putting a moratorium on the use of bad measurement. Eventually, clarity will emerge and become the norm.

Lead by example. Agency and department executives who wilfully choose to use irrelevant or improper measurement are only perpetuating the problem.

Instead, leaders must demonstrate the importance of proper measurement by setting the pace. There are many sources of measurement information, including the Institute for PR, the IABC and the PRSA, as well as through publications and Webinars such as those sponsored by *PR News*. Commit to educating your staff: Much of this information is free and it's easy to establish a "measurement task force" to develop in-house expertise. No excuses.

Make it easy. Each year, Delahaye surveys thousands of executives to uncover and help to define the value system by which they appraise public relations performance. What we've learned is that their expectations lean towards a measurement system that is meaningful, reasonable and measurable. Clip volume is measurable but it means little; driving sales is important but it's impractical. Instead, executives believe that "delivering key messages to target media," "beating the competition" and "meeting or beating objectives" cover the most important bases.

The great news is that the expectations of these executives are perfectly aligned with PR's abilities. What's needed, of course, is the commitment to measurement that makes these criteria possible to quantify. The easiest way to communicate PR performance is to do so in the preferred language: Following through on a commitment to concise clear measurement language is the first step towards comprehension, adoption and execution.

If it hasn't happened to you already, the day is soon approaching when you will be asked to "prove it." Public relations research and evaluation methods have reached the point where they are affordable, flexible and reliable. PR professionals can feel confident not only in responding to measurement questions but in taking the initiative for savings, value and continual improvement.

The PR measurement revolution is under way, and it's happening with you or without you. If you're not committed to becoming proactive about PR research and evaluation, I can assure you that one of your competitors already is. So rather than allowing the world to move forward without you, commit instead to taking these steps:

- Become acquainted with the science of public relations;
- Take charge rather than wait;
- Embrace the challenge; and
- Act now while others commit to beginning tomorrow.

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