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Planning and Managing an Integrated Global Media Monitoring Program

PR evaluation and media monitoring on a global scale are critical to meet the needs of businesses that increasingly operate and communicate across borders. Likewise, major media have gone global (thanks in part to the ever-growing selection of digital channels), thus requiring communications professionals to integrate global media measurement strategies into their evaluation mix.

Despite significant logistical challenges, global analysis and media monitoring systems can deliver substantial rewards, such as enabling better strategic planning and continual improvement in communication programs. Centralizing media intelligence, monitoring and evaluation programs also fosters efficiency and encourages cross-national alliances.

However, significant challenges must be overcome before international evaluation and monitoring systems can work: For example, centralizing monitoring and other processes requires organizational change; harmonizing data formats and standardizing measurement indices requires new degrees of cooperation among previously decentralized parties; and digitizing media content and information access can require significant investments in time and money. With these challenges in mind, the following are ways to enhance a global media monitoring program.

PREPARATION IS THE KEY

In media analysis, it is not always correct that complexity equals sophistication. The key to developing an effective measurement program is to use

sophisticated applications, both in methodology and technology, to provide intuitive solutions for complex needs. Equally important, however, is building a bridge of understanding between the researcher, the PR professional and organizational management, as these teams must work in tandem to have a completely operational measurement machine.

When aggregating data from media outlets around the world, the quality of data (clips, placement, tone, etc.) is important, but the quality of data is rarely an issue; rather, it's the choice, interpretation and representation of that data that usually disappoints. Thus, preparation is essential, as trying to fix a problem in the midst of a program is like trying to change a tire while the car is moving. To minimize the risk for this downfall, the program should be designed so modifications can take place horizontally, and not vertically.

The vertical structures of the media analysis project are the foundational layers of the project and database. These should be established at the onset of a project and should not be changed once built. The horizontal elements of the measurement program (countries, choice of media, clip relevant and selection criteria) are the moving parts; they must be incorporated to keep the program relevant and responsive. They can be added, changed or removed mid-stream to account for any changes that might be taking place in the media environment.

When planning the database foundation, identify a subset

of data, preferably from the past, that can be used to create a sample specimen report. If the outputs, learnings and data of this report meet your objectives, this can be viewed as a benchmark from which production, performance and budget issues are measured.

DOES EVERY CLIP COUNT?

The delivery of qualitative media analysis is currently over-reliant on the quantity of media mentions (clips). This originates from the view that success equals amassing 'ink' in newsprint. This is a faulty notion, as it does not consider a wide range of variables such as the size, nature and extent of the mentions; the dominance of your organization in context to others mentioned; and the organization's appearance in headlines, intro paragraphs and visuals, all contributing to the impact of the story.

It is important to note that it costs as much to procure and analyze an article from a media source that has marginal influence over your target audience as it does for a quality article in a highly influential publication or Internet site. Therefore, budget directed to qualitative analysis of articles from high influencing publications will yield greater returns than costs assigned to gather and analyze marginal yields from non-essential publications.

The wider the media net, the more likely it is that a large portion of the budget is spent on monitoring and analyzing media outlets that have little influence or penetration into

your primary target audiences.

To enhance the yields of your analysis and deliver information that informs global management, a framework for the selection of sources that covers the top strata of the most important media must be adopted. This is a disciplined activity. To guide this process, the identification of which audiences are most important to an organization will aid in the selection of a media universe. This identification process must always include digital media outlets such as blogs, as these online influencers often have the most intimate relationships with your target audience.

A consequential value to global companies is that new, Internet-based measurement technologies provide a common platform that makes standardization of methods and transference of information across geographic boundaries possible. It eliminates constraints of time and geography on communication professionals who monitor global media. Such solutions provide "one-click" digital online access, enabling communications professionals to monitor a more complex universe of media sources, including bloggers and citizen-journalists. It will also combine global reach with local expertise, and will elevate cross-office and cross-national cooperation, uniting organizational silos (such as marketing versus PR, or North American versus European operating groups). Information sharing will increase, thus leveraging efficiencies. **PRN**