

Rise Of New Media And Integrated Marketing Challenge Measurement

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It's not just your kid's Myspace page anymore, loaded with high school drama recaps and pictures from last night's house party. The explosive growth of social media platforms has infiltrated the inner workings of business, and it's been (for the most part) duly noted by communicators. But another trend has crept into the business landscape - that of the disintegrating distinctions among PR, marketing and journalism. Coupled with the growth of new media, this has complicated PR's reliance on measurement to gain C-suite acceptance and prove contribution to bottom-line results. (See page 2, Charting the Industry, for statistics to back up this trend.)

Which raises the question: Considering this increased vagueness of job descriptions, as well as the proliferation of new communications channels, how should communicators approach new media measurement, especially as they begin sharing office space, titles and even (gasp) budget dollars with their marketing counterparts?

Just like all journeys to self-actualization, the first step is acceptance, both of new media's place in the industry and of the burgeoning (if not unrequited) relationship between PR execs and marketers. Says Peter Verrengia, president of Communications Consulting Worldwide, a global business unit of Fleishman-Hillard: "PR people need to be careful that they don't spend so much time defending the label of their activities that they miss an opportunity. Marketers have had the advantage in the past, but the direct connection to the customer is no longer only in their province. The interactive PR professional has as direct a connection to the customer - it's marketing in the uncontrolled environment."

So, then, accepting the convergence of marketing and PR (and journalism, with the maturation of consumer-driven media) is necessary, but what does it mean for new media measurement practices?

"PR executives who walk in with a completely different [measurement] toolbox basically guarantee irrelevance," says Verrengia. "And new media measurement is more an opportunity for PR because it's used to dealing with an uncontrolled environment. Our whole function is to affect the uncontrolled relations with audiences."

Enter the benefits of new media. It is an area in which the PR function can excel, and one where measurement tools are "non-denominational," so to speak. Plus, new measurement capabilities in the PR and marketing mix can now identify key influencers in social media networks and manage brand and reputation implications accordingly. After all, many a crisis germinates online with a blog or message-board post before blowing up in the mainstream media (think Sony and its battle with digital rights management), and it behooves PR executives (who manage brand) and marketers (who may be more product/sales-centric) to mitigate bad mojo - or to stimulate positive conversations. It's just a matter of applying traditional media measurement best practices to the new online domains:

Engage your own experts. "The whole concept of enabling and empowering your organization to communicate with all constituencies - that's really what the new rules of measurement are about," says Alan Scott, chief marketing officer of Dow Jones Enterprise Media Group and SVP of Dow Jones & Company. "It's the new golden age of PR. PR pros are as important as ever - and they need to engage the experts in your organization. That's the first best practice." So there you have it: PR's got power (that's straight from the mouth of a CMO), but the first step in engaging in any sort of effective measurement is to first ensure that all experts within the organization have engaged with constituents. Otherwise, no conversations will be generated, leaving very little to measure.

Own it (or at least learn to share). Verrengia points to the fact that many corpcomm and PR teams don't even take responsibility for understanding and tracking the digital media environment; rather, it's being

done (albeit inadvertently, in many cases) by groups like online advertising or online maintenance, who already have the data - or at least the mechanism for tracking it.

Then, in terms of the PR/marketing dynamic around measurement, PR people must act as the integrators. "They come together when it comes to spending the dollars," says Mark Vangel, senior account director of Delahaye. "There needs to be integration because it's about communicating the brand." After all, the PR/marketing love has been shared in measurement before - think about the marketing mix modeling used to make the PR-to-sales connection.

And, according to Diane Thieke, director of global public relations for Dow Jones, "Both PR and marketing are primarily concerned with the reputation of the company, so core messages really revolve around what the company is. And both gather information and bring it back in." Scott expands upon the relationship, saying, "PR measurement drives the enhancement of marketing messages based on the marketplace's candid assessment of the product."

Start small: If you don't have the budget for a big vendor that specializes in collecting and analyzing online mentions, build an RSS feed with the key words and phrases that are most relevant to your brand/organization. It's a preliminary step, true, but it is a move towards the text-mining, entity extraction and "bursting phrases" monitoring enabled by outside vendors, who build individualized monitoring systems for each organization based on critical points and key influencers.

Consider the possibilities. New media measurement isn't just a supplement to the measurement of traditional media outlets; its real-time, automated characteristics - plus its traceability and connectivity - open new doors for tracking and understanding key audiences. For example, you can look at the level of reference versus the level of participation, and you can track links between blogs and people. You can, in effect, "follow people around" to see if they are leading organized efforts for or against your organization; either way, you can respond accordingly with messaging and marketing efforts.

Know what to look for - and use the tools that will help you. The "what to look for" includes product names or subjects, natural language searching for strings or words that are (or are similar to) your messages, key opinion leaders, competitors. Then, as for tools:

"Fundamentally, a few things converge to create a state of the art tool: at the basic level, it's access to the right content sources (mainstream media, newswires, etc). Secondly, it's access to blogs, discussion boards, NGO sites and similar kinds of new media, so you can monitor threads," Scott says. "Because that's such a mammoth amount of information, the technologies to apply are text mining, which creates algorithms to look for words in proximity to company and brands, then it analyzes them, as well as taxonomies and meta-data, which gives context around the article."

There are two lessons to be learned, then, when it comes to the two trends gaining momentum in the PR industry. First, when it comes to new media measurement: Just do it, because the tools are out there. Second, in terms of PR executives who resist camaraderie, companionship or cohabitation with marketers: Embrace it, because it's to everyone's highest good. Choosing to ignore it is the equivalent of being your own worst nightmare.

"We've met the enemy," Verrengia says, "and 'they is us.'"

Contact:

Peter Verrengia, peter.verrengia@ccworldwide.com; Mark Vangel, mvangel@delahaye.com; Alan Scott, alan.scott@dowjones.com; Diane Thieke, diane.thieke@dowjones.com.