

# Mind your metrics

## Building a measurement strategy across paid, earned and owned media

By Jay Krall

One of the ramifications of the ongoing convergence of paid, earned and owned media is a need for professional communicators to grapple with a greater breadth of signals — encompassing a wide variety of sharing and conversation indicators on social sites available for measurement.

We first saw this growth as the social Web began to blossom several years ago. Suddenly, a whole new category of metrics has emerged: retweets, bookmarks, votes and Facebook Likes.

More organizations — corporate, nonprofit and government — have begun to incorporate these into their approaches to media and communications measurement. Some have decided that measuring consistently year-over-year is more important than incorporating more metric types as they become available from social sites.

Measuring through engagement data brings its own challenges. The design of a user-rating system within a particular social site can have a significant effect on your search results, especially in the case of negative media attention or a crisis scenario. For example, many people have noted that it seems uncouth to Like a news story about Japan's nuclear crisis on Facebook. News-sharing sites like Reddit, where viewers vote on links that they like or dislike and help decide what's popular, create an arena where negative news gets a fairer percent of sharing activity. Of course, don't bet on Facebook to create an "Unlike" button, which could risk alienating advertisers.

As PR professionals come to grips with measuring earned media on the social Web, we encounter new data brought by paid/earned/owned convergence, from cost-per-click to cost-per-impression and cost-per-lead.

Meanwhile, we're watching Web analytics such as page views, average time spent and unique visitors, as well as search engine optimization-focused indicators like inbound linking activity, that span all three of the converging media realms.

All of this leaves many of us with this March Madness-like feeling of trying to

watch four basketball games at once. So how do we begin to organize all of this?

### Reading signals

A good starting point is to recognize that there are signals available to measure reach, engagement and authority — and you can apply any of these to paid, earned and owned media to some extent.

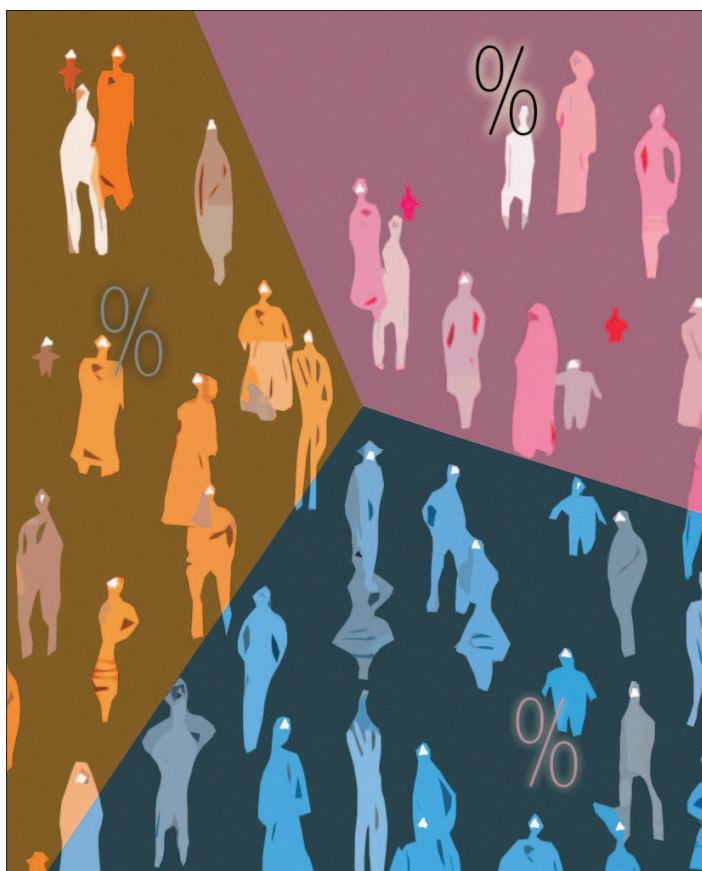
When evaluating what a particular

Other cases are more straightforward. Traditional Web metrics such as page views only measure reach. The number of inbound links from quality, authoritative sites is a major ingredient of Google's search algorithm. So when track-backs from link farms and other less-than-reputable sources are excluded, you can consider a

page's inbound link count as a measure of authority.

You can consider Facebook Likes as an indicator of both reach and engagement, despite the limitations of their application to crisis situations.

When you click the Like button for a particular piece of content — whether it's on Facebook or on an external site — you are broadening that content's reach by simultaneously publishing it to your news feed. But other measures that we might consider



signal is telling you, start by determining whether it's an indicator of reach, engagement or authority. Sometimes a single metric will serve as a multi-purpose indicator. For instance, the number of retweets for a particular piece of content indicates how widely the story was shared and how many people thought it was worth sharing, so I would call that an indicator of both reach and engagement.

However, this information doesn't tell you whether the people who shared it were tastemakers. So without an in-depth analysis of who retweeted your press release or blog post, you might not consider retweets as an indicator of authority.

as indicators of engagement don't also broaden reach in this way.

For example, if you were to comment on my blog, then I could consider that as a sign that you are interacting with what I wrote. But in and of itself, your comment hasn't brought new readers to my post, so I can't claim that it broadens my reach.

### Focusing on strategies

Evaluating each new metric according to whether it confers reach, engagement or authority on the content that it references can help you decide whether to incorporate it into your measurement strategy. It's also important to decide whether to rate the three equally. Many organizations have come to place a higher emphasis on engagement in recent years — even de-emphasizing Web traffic and other gauges of reach. Others have continued to focus solely on impressions and reach.

The approach can sometimes be dic-

### Search marketing by the numbers

- **74 percent** of North American ad agencies say their clients use Facebook.
- **75 percent** of companies use Twitter to promote their companies or brands and **52 percent** use LinkedIn.
- **44 percent** of companies do SEO in-house.

Source: Study released on April 12 by SEMPO

tated by cultural factors. Maybe your company doesn't watch for praise and criticism in a feed of tweets mentioning its brands, but officials closely watch the Google search results for those brands.

Measurement never occurs in a vacuum; it is connected to an organization's goals and values. Crafting a strategy that fits is a great opportunity for any communications professional during this exciting time of cross-pollination in public relations, marketing and advertising. **T**



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### Building comprehensive measurement strategies

- You have new metrics available for measuring engagement on the social Web as social platforms grow and evolve.
- You can decide what to measure by evaluating each new metric for its ability to gauge reach, engagement and authority.
- Your measurement strategy reflects your organization's goals and culture. **T**