



GETTING THE MEASURE OF YOUR

MESSAGE

**Brunswick's ANTONIO ORTOLANI
comes to grips with gauging
the effectiveness of communications**

Communications professionals have long acknowledged the difficulty of measuring campaign effectiveness. In 2014, *PR Week* pointed to the rise of digital media and said, “Traditional measurement methods no longer work ... [the] industry finds itself groping the dark when it comes to identifying the outcomes of PR and corporate communication ...”

The problem is that measurement of communications effectiveness is too often focused on counting simple outputs, such as volume or impressions, and has few links to positive business change and real decision-making. Even where communicators attempt to apply better measurement, they often wait until a campaign has ended, leaving little if any opportunity to improve content and strategy.

To be most useful, measurement should be an ongoing process tied to real business change, with implementation in four distinct stages: changing communications, changing conversations, changing

minds and changing business. A handful of entrenched misconceptions prevents organizations from implementing measurement rigorous enough to move through all four stages. The good news is that there are agreed principles that foster a growing awareness of the challenges of measurement and give a clear direction for assessing effective campaigns.

At the *changing communications* stage, start by defining what success will look like, using numbers that will clearly communicate your goals in the boardroom. Have a map instead of a hunch, benchmarking where you currently stand and how you'll get to your intended destination. Overall, keep it focused and manageable – don't try to measure everything. Framework in hand, identify the key metrics that reflect the change your strategy is targeting at each subsequent stage.

As the campaign gets under way, the focus will be on *changing conversations*. You will deploy messages to communications outlets such as specialized content publishers, media briefings, training,

and organized events, so you will be keeping an eye on how those are received. Impact can be measured through key message pickup, increased positive sentiment and audience reach.

For the next stage, *changing minds*, you will want to show how your campaign influenced attitudes and behaviors. At this stage, consider measuring awareness, third-party advocacy, social media engagement and increased requests for information.

The final stage of a successful campaign, *changing business*, can be assessed through measurement of traditional business goals – market share, sales, donations, employee retention, endorsements or the passing or blocking of legislation, as a few examples.

THE BARCELONA PRINCIPLES

The push to improve metrics took a step forward in 2010 when communications professionals, researchers and academics from around the world gathered at a summit convened by the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communications in Barcelona and adopted seven principles. The “Barcelona Principles” go beyond often-criticized metrics such as “advertising value equivalency” rates, or AVEs:

- Goal setting and measurement are essential to effective communications strategies.
- Measurement should focus on the effect on outcomes rather than the quantity of outputs.
- The campaign’s effect on sales and other business results can and should be measured where possible.
- The quality of media coverage is as important as quantity, including the coverage tone and credibility.
- AVEs measure the cost of media space and are not an appropriate measure to value public relations.
- Social media can and should be measured and carries special considerations.
- Transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement.

Since 2010, the industry has been working to implement these principles, bringing them to life for communicators – and helping spread the word that the industry has moved beyond AVEs.

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FIVE MEASUREMENT MYTHS

Misconceptions prevent the use of rigorous metrics in communications

- 1. It's too expensive** Is spending a small percentage of your budget expensive if it reveals that the campaign isn't working? Measurement is still one of the most cost-effective ways to improve your communications success. There's a measurement approach to fit every budget.
- 2. It's too complicated** Measuring the effectiveness of a campaign doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing proposition. As Warren Buffett said: "It's better to be approximately right than precisely wrong." Start small and scale up, and gain a strong foundation in the basics of measurement along the way.
- 3. It takes too long** This will definitely be true if you leave all the research and assessment until the end of the campaign. Meanwhile you will have lost the opportunity to correct any weakness. Take advantage of the breadth and declining cost of real-time monitoring and faster opinion research options available, and you can make measurement an ongoing process, from initial benchmarking to overall evaluation.
- 4. Quantity matters more than quality** Communicators may be envious of the big, sexy numbers thrown around by their colleagues in marketing and advertising, but quantitative consumer data sets are not very useful to measure the impact of corporate communications. Instead, qualitative metrics such as sentiment, messaging, attribution and differentiation are necessary to evaluate specific audiences and hard-to-reach stakeholders.
- 5. You need a big knockout number** Communicators should ask if pursuit of the "über metric" is the best objective. Metrics are important, but are just one way of demonstrating value. A more important goal may be simply to sharpen communications. The same research tools used to show how a campaign has "moved the needle" are ideal to inform strategy, provide insights and help craft messages that influence views and behavior.

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