

The inconvenient truth of PR measurement

 By [Heidi Myers](#), issued by [Meltwater](#)

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In an age where web traffic reports, sales figures and social media followers can all be analysed in a heartbeat and business leaders are under pressure from finance directors, the onus falls on marketing to quantify how its mix of activities affect the bottom line.

Where does PR fit into all of this? For a long time, PR agencies and in-house communications professionals have rooted around in the background, not getting much credit for great work done to drive brand awareness and customer engagement, particularly when it attempts to put its results into numbers – in the form of advertising value equivalent (AVE).

AVE serves a financial purpose and has, for years, done an excellent job of explaining the value of PR to those unfamiliar with marketing and the media, but the world is changing and so is the PR industry. It's been many years since a piece of print coverage was measured with an actual ruler, for example.

Nowadays, PRs aren't just targeted on the output of content or even the coverage hits they secure – clients want to know about outcomes as well as understanding how the activity impacts on the overall business objectives. For example, has the coverage achieved led to a greater share of voice over competitors or can targeting new verticals open up business opportunities in new sectors? In an age where digital is key and social conversations are often centric to brand sentiment; how do PRs begin to measure all of that?

There are impressive platforms out there that can measure a number of factors including share of voice, sentiment and tone, as well as searching for key message penetration. Ultimately, being able to measure the success of a campaign across all stakeholder touchpoints is vital to determine success or failure of a PR campaign. It's no good simply being able to look at the number of mentions a company is receiving. You need to be able to analyse whether the comments are positive or negative, and drill down into the finer detail, including an appreciation of the author of the content.

During Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour party leader, for example, news exploded with 80% of online articles being largely negative. However, the tone on social media was wildly different to that in the press, with 52% of conversations being positive. If PR professionals can harness that kind of insight, they will get a far more accurate view of what is being talked about, in real time.

The AVE debate has been rumbling on for years. One thing for sure is that the PR industry, as a whole, needs to agree how best to measure the success of campaign, and fast. Perhaps the way forward is in fact a balance between these technologies, rather than relying solely on counting column inches.

AVE alone isn't enough. Yet, the inconvenient truth is that for many, it still serves a purpose for proving return on investment to the financial director.

ABOUT HEIDI MYERS

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