

The practical implementation of real PR measurement...

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A global public relations measurement survey done in March 2013 by US-based Ragan Communications and NASDAQ OMX showed an industry that was serious about tackling the problem of accurately measuring the value of public relations. However, the survey also highlighted the long road still ahead before consistent measurement standards emerge, with only 25% of the 1467 respondents indicating they even understood return on investment (ROI).

The fifth European summit on measurement, "Unlocking business performance - the role of communications research and analytics", being held in Madrid in June 2013, will again see global communications measurement experts grapple with the issue as the industry searches for measurement answers.

However, it was the second summit, held in 2010 in Barcelona, that saw the refining and adoption of what became known as the **Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles** - probably the most important set of measurement guidelines ever identified for PR measurement.

AMEC (The International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication) and the IPR (Institute for Public Relations) initiated efforts to improve communications measurement and these principles were then reviewed and refined by delegates from more than 30 countries which included members from AMEC, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) Measurement Commission and the International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO). This was a serious industry-wide effort to bring professional standards and consistency to PR measurement.

What the recent Ragan / NASDAQ OMX survey showed though was that very few global practitioners were even aware of these principles, with 66% not familiar with it and a further 17% indicating they did not know how it applied to PR metrics. It can be presumed that even fewer practitioners in South Africa are aware of this and how it can be applied to improve Public Relations measurement. It is thus worthwhile to relook these principles and get the conversation going on how to implement them:

In short the Barcelona Principles are the following:

1. The importance of goal setting and measurement.
2. Measuring the effect on outcomes is preferred to measuring media results.
3. The effect on business results can and should be measured where possible.
4. Media measurement requires quantity and quality.
5. Advertising value equivalents (AVEs) are not the value of public relations.
6. Social media can and should be measured.
7. Transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement.

It is obviously fundamental to have a goal for any PR project - who needs to be affected, what behavioural change from the target audience is required, by when etc. Measuring this should then also take a wide approach using traditional and new media, comprehension and attitude changes from the target audience and the influence of the campaign on the business results.

While practitioners have traditionally measured outputs, eg. the number of articles they generated in the media, the principles suggest it is more important to measure the affect these items had in changing the audience's comprehension or behaviour. A benchmark survey done before the campaign and then a follow-up could thus be a very useful measurement tool.

Though communicators have traditionally shied away from financial statements it is of utmost importance to learn the lingua franca of the accountants and senior management of organisations. PR professionals need to be able to demonstrate the value and ROI of campaigns in the broader marketing mix - including how the campaign changed consumer behaviour and increased sales.

An example would, for instance, be a Facebook campaign that was launched to promote a certain product. The easy way would be to measure the number of "likes" on the page but a far more accurate measure would be to track the "likes" who actually purchased the product, ideally through an efficient CRM (customer relationship management) system. If the campaign cost R5000, generated 200 "likes" of which 50 people actually purchased the product at R500, the ROI can basically be measured the following way:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{(\text{Financial Gain or Savings} - \text{Cost})}{\text{Cost}}$$

Cost

$$\text{ROI} = (25\,000 - 5000)/5000 = 4$$

Hence a ROI of 4/1 for the campaign. Though this is a pretty basic example, communicators will need to start identifying these kinds of measurement perimeters applicable to them and make those calculations. It would probably be a good idea to make friends with the accountants!

The quantity and quality of the coverage should then also be tracked, which include the prominence, credibility and relevance of the media, mentions of company spokespeople, the tone of the coverage etc. Measurement should ideally then also look at various reputational factors which may impact the organisation, either in a positive, neutral or negative way.

Probably the most controversial principle identified in Barcelona was rejecting the use of the famous Advertising Value Equivalent (AVE) as a measurement for the value of public relations. Multipliers, as editorial coverage is supposedly more credible than advertising, have also been rejected. AVEs purely measure the cost of media space, not public relations, and should be seen as such. Though South African PR practitioners and clients still favour the use of AVEs, the Ragan / NASDAQ OMX PR Survey did show that globally only 32% of practitioners still utilise it as a measurement metric.

Though social media was still a relative newcomer to public relations in 2010, the importance of measuring it was already deemed of utmost importance and it is probably getting more important by the day. Luckily, as social media grew and the need for insights increased, many tools are now available to assist PR professionals with measurement. Social media is probably one of the easier mediums to monitor and measure these days!

The final principle demands measurement transparency and replicability - basically, should someone else use the same sources and methodologies, the same results should be calculated and identified.

With the creation in 2012 of SAMMA (The South African Media Monitoring and Measurement Association) the stage has been set for local PR measurement to be greatly improved. According to Ornico's Oresti Patricios, co-founder and current chairman of SAMMA, the organisation will do its utmost to explore and import global best measurement practices while ensuring that these remain relevant to the South African environment and context.

The Madrid PR measurement conference in June 2013 is sure to edge the industry closer to standardising measurement based on the Barcelona Principles. Unfortunately there is no easy standard formula yet and PR professionals will still need to do a little extra to demonstrate the true value of their efforts.

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