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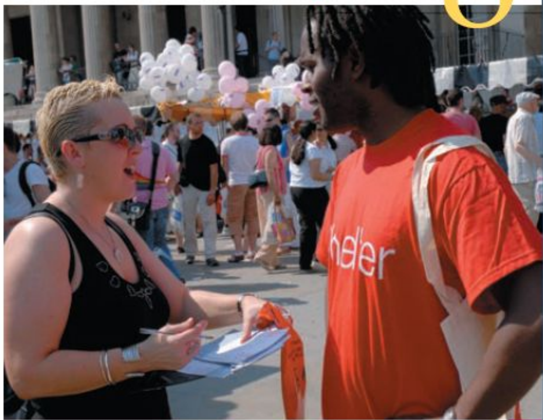
Evaluation and Measurement of Public Relations Programs

8 chapter



After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

Know the key elements of objectives

Understand the purpose of evaluation

Distinguish the measurement of different communication components

The Purpose of Evaluation

> We are talking about an orderly evaluation of our progress in attaining the specific objectives of our public relations plan. We are learning what we did right, what we did wrong, how much progress we've made and, most importantly, how we can do it better next time.
>
> *Frank Wylie, emeritus professor at California State University in Long Beach*

The fourth step of the public relations process is evaluation. It is the measurement of results against established objectives set during the planning process discussed in Chapter 6.

Evaluation involves the systematic assessment of a program, particularly focusing on communication results. It is a means for practitioners to offer accountability to clients—and to themselves. Evaluation provides the opportunity to learn what was done right and what was done wrong, both as a look backward at performance and as a look forward at the improvement of performance.

The desire to do a better job next time is a major reason for evaluating public relations efforts, but another equally important reason is the widespread adoption of the management-by-objectives system by clients and employers of public relations personnel. They want to know whether the money, time, and effort expended on public relations are well spent and contribute to the realization of an organizational objective, such as attendance at an open house, product sales, or increased awareness of obesity in children.

Objectives: A Prerequisite for Evaluation

Before any public relations program can be properly evaluated, it is important to have a clearly established set of measurable objectives. These should be part of the program plan (discussed in Chapter 6), but first some points need to be reviewed.

- Public relations personnel and management should agree on the criteria that will be used to evaluate success in attaining objectives.
- Don't wait until the end of the public relations program to determine how it will be evaluated. Albert L. Schweitzer at Fleishman-Hillard public relations in St. Louis makes the point: "Evaluating impact/results starts in the planning stage. You break down the problem into measurable goals and objectives, then after implementing the program, you measure the results against goals."
- If an objective is informational, measurement techniques must show how successfully information was communicated to target audiences. Such techniques fall under the rubrics of "message dissemination" and "audience exposure," but they do not measure the effect on attitudes or overt behavior and action.
- Motivational objectives are more difficult to accomplish. If the objective is to increase sales or market share, it is important to show that public relations efforts, rather than advertising or other marketing strategies, caused the increase. Or, if the objective is to change attitudes or opinions, research should be done before and after the public relations activity to measure the percentage of change.

> Write the most precise, most results-oriented objectives you can that are realistic, credible, measurable, and compatible with the client's demands on public relations.
>
> *Agency monograph, Ketchum Public Relations*

Although objectives may vary, the following checklist contains the basic evaluation questions that any practitioner should ask:

- Was the activity or program adequately planned?
- Did the recipients of the message understand it?
- How could the program strategy have been more effective?
- Were all primary and secondary audiences reached?
- Was the desired organizational objective achieved?
- What unforeseen circumstances affected the success of the program or activity?
- Did the program or activity fall within the budget set for it?
- What steps can be taken to improve the success of similar future activities?

Current Status of Measurement and Evaluation

Public relations professionals have made considerable progress in evaluation and measurement, the ability to tell clients and employers exactly what has been accomplished. Sophisticated software programs and techniques are being used, including computerized news clip analysis, survey sampling, quasi-experimental designs in which the audience is divided into groups that see different aspects of a public relations campaign, and attempts to correlate efforts directly with sales.

Today, the trend toward more systematic evaluation is well established. Katherine Paine, founder of her own public relations measurement firm, says that the percentage of a public relations budget devoted to measurement and evaluation was about 1 percent in the 1990s, but is now closer to 5 percent. A 2010 study by the USC Annenberg Strategic Public Relations Center found about the same percentage; the average corporation devotes only 4 to 5 percent of its total public relations budget to evaluation and measurement. Advocates say measurement should be at least 10 percent of budget because there is constant pressure on public relations departments to justify their budgets and prove their value to the bottom line.

> If you have not carved off at least 10 percent of your budget to measure your impact, you're flying blind, and you have no way of proving your value.
>
> *Mark Stouse, director of worldwide communications for BMC*

Some practitioners maintain that public relations is more art than science and is thus extremely difficult to measure. Walter K. Lindenmann, a former senior vice president and director of research at Ketchum, takes a more optimistic view. He wrote in *Public Relations Quarterly*: "Let's get something straight right off the bat. First, it is possible to measure public relations effectiveness. . . . Second, measuring public relations effectiveness does not have to be either unbelievably expensive or laboriously time-consuming."

The Institute for Public Relations (www.instituteforpr.org) also takes the view that public relations effectiveness can be systematically evaluated. It has commissioned a notable library of research and guidelines about measurement over the past 20 years, with most papers available free of charge on its website. The institute's slogan captures the essence of its mission: "The science beneath the art of public relations."

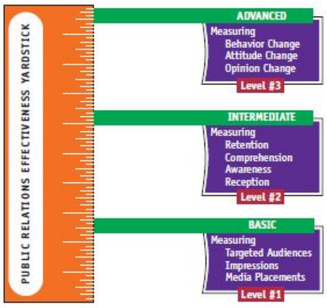
Lindenmann suggests that public relations personnel use a mix of evaluation techniques, many adapted from advertising and marketing, to provide more complete evaluation. In addition, he notes that there are at least three levels of measurement and evaluation (see Figure 8.1).

On the most basic level are compilations of message distribution and media placement. The second level, which requires more sophisticated techniques, deals with the

Figure 8.1 Public Relations Effectiveness Yardstick

Evaluation goals for public relations programs can be grouped at three levels of measurement, as shown in this chart.

Source: Ketchum, New York, published in *Public Relations Quarterly*.



measurement of audience awareness, comprehension, and retention of the message. The most advanced level is the measurement of changes in attitudes, opinions, and behavior.

The following sections outline the most widely used methods for evaluating public relations efforts. These include measurement of (1) production, (2) message exposure, (3) audience awareness, (4) audience attitudes, and (5) audience action. Supplemental activities such as communication audits, readability tests, event evaluation, and split messages also are discussed. In most cases, a skilled practitioner will use a combination of methods to evaluate the effectiveness of a program.

Measurement of Production

One elementary form of evaluation is simply to count how many news releases, feature stories, photos, tweets, guest editorials, blog postings, and the like, are produced in a given period of time. This kind of evaluation is supposed to give management an idea of a staff's productivity and output.

Public relations professionals, however, do not believe that this evaluation is very meaningful, because it emphasizes quantity instead of quality. In most cases, it is more cost effective to write fewer news releases and spend more time on the few that really are newsworthy (see Insights box in Chapter 7 on page 219). It could also be more valuable to the organization for a staff person to spend five weeks working to place an article in the *Wall Street Journal* than to write 29 routine personnel releases.

Closely allied to the production of publicity materials is their distribution. Thus, a public relations department might report, for instance, that a total of 756 news releases were sent to 819 daily newspapers, 250 weeklies, and 137 trade magazines within one year or that 230 messages were posted on the organization's blog. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention campaign to inform parents about the early symptoms of autism in children, for example, reported that 21,000 resource kits were distributed to health professionals and another 60,000 were distributed to parents.

Measurement of Message Exposure

The most widely practiced form of evaluating public relations programs is the compilation of print and broadcast mentions, often called "clips." The Insights box which follows, for example, shows that both U.S. and European professionals still heavily rely on "clippings." Public relations firms and company departments working primarily on a local basis, for example, often have a staff member scan area newspapers for client or product mentions.

Large companies with regional, national, or even international outreach usually retain monitoring services to scan large numbers of publications and various Internet/social media sites. It is also possible to have services such as Critical Mention monitor television newscasts in major markets as well as local and national talk shows. Web analytics covered in Chapter 5 measures similar exposure metrics for Web and social media.

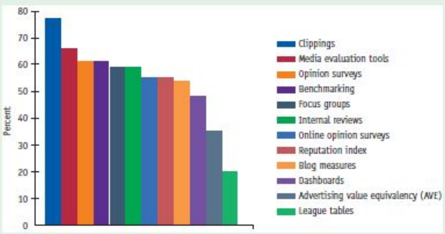
on the job

INSIGHTS

Effectiveness of Measurement Tools

BenchPoint, a measurement firm, conducted a global survey of public relations and communications professionals for the first European Measurement Summit in Berlin. The respondents, coming primarily from Europe and the United States, ranked the effectiveness of the measurement tools they use to monitor the public relations initiatives in their firms and departments. As illustrated in Figure 8.2, respondents ranked "clippings" first in effectiveness but using advertising equivalency ranked eleventh.

Figure 8.2 **Benchpoint's Survey Data**



Burrelles/Luce, for example, monitors over 40 million blogs and Internet forums, thousands of Web news sources, over 10,000 daily and nondaily newspapers, magazines, and trade journals, and virtually all TV and cable stations. Another monitoring service, National Aircheck, is able to search almost 8,000 hours of news talk radio each week. Robb Wexler, president of the firm, told *O'Dwyer's PR Report*, "We should be able to tell someone within 10 to 15 minutes where and when they're being talked about."

The result of all this electronic research is the ability for the organization or its public relations firm to do a fairly accurate count of how many traditional and new media stories are generated by the program or campaign. The celebration of Latin style by Suave beauty products featured in Chapter 6, generated a sixfold increase in print coverage of the product line and a 12 percent increase in Hispanic TV ratings over the previous year. The number of media placements, however, is just the first level of assessing the exposure of the message to potential audiences.

on the job

INSIGHTS

Measuring Effectiveness on the Web

Blogs, chat groups, and online publications can also be monitored using the metric of visits to a site, but such data are less valuable than the content and tone of what is being said. (See Web Analytics and Social Media Monitoring in Chapter 5 for details on cutting-edge research tools.) Consequently, public relations professionals compile mentions regarding the organization or client. In describing online evaluation research, Rod Amis, writing in *Public Relations Tactics*, says, "Think of it as a digital clipping service that runs on autopilot."

Monitoring blogs and chat groups is increasingly important in issues management. While the people expressing their views online may not represent the opinion of the majority, their comments often give organizations a "wake-up call" about potential problems and issues. Social media monitoring and participation provide direct feedback about what people are thinking, what rumors are circulating about the organization, and how well public relations efforts have performed to manage the trajectory of important issues in vast online communities.

Measurement in the new media world increasingly prioritizes the tracking and monitoring of visual impacts. For example, YouTube has improved its ability to provide more data beyond just the number of viewers and how many times a video has been downloaded. YouTube gives account holders who have uploaded videos to the site a range of statistics, charts, and maps about their audience. YouTube Insight, an analytics and reporting engine, provides viewing statistics, popularity metrics, and demographic information for videos and channels. The data available through Insight include age, gender, and geographic location as well as the identities of the Internet sites that viewers came from and where they went after watching a video.

Tracy Chan told the *Los Angeles Times*, "Marketers and advertisers use the data to decide how to target their next round of ads or where bands should tour." She was referring to Weezer, an alternative rock band that found out that 2.2 million watched their YouTube video, but that 65 percent of the audience were men under 18 and between ages 35 and 45.

Other metrics on the Internet are more difficult to quantify. Social network sites, for example, are all about listening, participating, and engaging the audience, rather than

(continued)

necessarily delivering key messages. Ed Terpening, VP of social media at Wells Fargo, told a Dow Jones seminar, "We care a lot about participation and engagement. That's our No. 1 metric." These communication activities can be evaluated using more qualitative methods such as analysis of themes or breakdown of patterns in the online conversations combined with illustrative quotes for management to get a sense of the social discourse.

One dimension is called the "conversation index," which is the ratio between blog posts and comments. It helps measure whether a blogger is doing a lot of writing with very little response from readers, or whether the audience is engaged and contributing to the conversation. Obviously, blogs that generate a lot of "conversation" are more important to organizations in terms of feedback and dialogue.

Another metric that is somewhat difficult to quantify is the tone of the conversation; is it positive, hostile, or neutral? Some experts say this is too simplistic since it doesn't take into consideration whether someone is being sarcastic. Tone can be misconstrued by analysis that evaluates language too literally. Nevertheless, such information generally helps organizations respond to concerns raised by key publics such as consumers. Other forms of measurement are (1) engagement, such as time spent with the site and whether visitors downloaded materials; (2) word-of-mouth impact; and (3) search engine visibility.

In sum, the ability to measure the effectiveness of social media is continuing to evolve. For example, concepts such as human voice and authenticity of social media offerings are being developed to enhance the value of raw numbers that are so readily found in new media environments by capturing server data. Both new measures challenge public relations professionals to craft messages in new media channels to which audiences can relate.

> Right now we are doing a lot of work to mash up social [media] data with business data to get cause and effect . . . . You've got to be able to tie causes to effects, and that is the big challenge right now, what all our clients, and what is frankly hardest to accomplish.
>
> *Josh Jones-Dilworth, founder and CEO of Jones-Dilworth, Inc.*

Media Impressions

In addition to the number of media placements, public relations departments and firms report how many people may have been exposed to the message. These numbers are referred to as *media impressions*, the potential audience reached by a periodical, a broadcast program, or a website.

If, for example, a story about an organization appears in a local daily that has a circulation of 130,000, the media impressions are 130,000. If another story is published the next day, this counts as 130,000 more impressions. Estimated audiences for radio and television programs, certified by auditing organizations, also are used to compile media impressions. Thus, if there's even a brief mention of a new product or service on *Today*, for example, this might constitute 10 million impressions, if that is the audited size of the audience that regularly watches the program.

Some firms inflate the number of "impressions" by also estimating the number of people who are not actual subscribers, but who may read a newspaper because it is delivered to the office or home. So instead of 130,000 impressions, it would be 520,000 impressions based on the pass-along readership, the estimated additional individuals with access to the newspaper. A regional or national news story can generate millions of impressions by simple multiplication of each placement by the circulation or audience of each medium. The Doritos Super Bowl advertising competition generated more than 600 million impressions. The breakdown, in part, included:

- 25 national print/wire features
- 108 national TV and radio segments
- More than 360 online news stories
- More than 2,200 local TV/radio mentions

Media impressions are commonly used in advertising to document the breadth of penetration of a particular message. Such figures give a rough estimate of how many people are potentially exposed to a message. They don't, however, document how many people actually read or heard the stories and, more importantly, how many absorbed or acted on the information. Other techniques needed for this kind of evaluation are discussed later in this chapter.

Basic Web Analytics

Measuring the reach and effectiveness of messages on the Internet is getting more sophisticated by the month. One cyberspace version of media impressions, used for some years, is the number of people reached via an organization's web page. Each instance of a person accessing a site is called a **hit** or a **visit**. (See Web Analytics in Chapter 5, which details online measurement techniques and the Multicultural World box in this chapter about World Water Day on page 231, which shows some Web and social analytics in action.)

In a national campaign to increase awareness of autism, for example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 540,000 unique visitors and more than 50,000 materials downloaded from its website. Even a campaign by the National Potato Board did pretty well. Its Mr. Potato Head site attracted almost 10,000 visitors, who spent an average of 5.5 minutes at the site, reviewing an average of 6.6 pages, about the health benefits of potatoes.

Additional information about users is often gathered by asking them to answer some demographic questions before they use the site or as they leave it. For best results, offer free software or something similar that must be mailed to users; this entices people to give their names and addresses. Marketers, for example, use this technique to compile databases of potential customers.

> Targeted outreach affects web traffic. That's the gold standard of how to develop our measurement program.
>
> *Sbonali Burke, VP of media for ASPCA, as quoted in* PRWeek

Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE)

Another approach, now widely condemned by most national and international professional groups, is to calculate the value of a news story or broadcast mention by comparing it to what the space or time would cost in advertising. In other words, a five-inch article in a trade magazine that charges $200 per column inch for advertising would be worth $1,000 in publicity value. The Doritos Super Bowl campaign, mentioned earlier, claimed that the news coverage was comparable to $40 million in paid advertising.

Some practitioners even take the approach of calculating the cost of advertising for the same amount of space and then multiplying that total three to six times to reflect the common belief that a news story has greater credibility than an advertisement. Several mitigating factors, however, argue against using a multiplier. For one, there is on the job

A MULTICULTURAL WORLD

YouTube Videos Promote World Water Day

Public relations agency Weber Shandwick (WS) and Population Services International (PSI) combined forces to create a social media campaign that capitalizes on the emotional power of video. World Water Day Viral Video Series set out to open eyes to the heartbreaking reality of water-related disease as a major cause of death worldwide for children.

PSI wanted socially and environmentally conscious Americans to know that unsafe drinking water often leads to sudden death and devastating illness for children in developing countries. The online public service announcement (PSA) video series informed people of the simple, cheap solutions to the problem.

The team knew that the key to generating strong viewership of the online PSA videos was telling a compelling story, so it enlisted Good, an integrated media company, to help build a strong narrative. From here, the team took an unconventional approach and drew upon existing footage from iconic Hollywood moments, including scenes from *Cool Hand Luke* and *Psycho*. In one video, children are seen sliding down a chute of the popular toy Crocodile Mile, but landing in sludgy, contaminated water.

To generate buzz leading up to World Water Day, WS conducted a staggered rollout. Prior to the videos' launch, content editors at YouTube got a sneak peek to stimulate their interest in a home page exclusive. The first four videos were then launched on PSI's partner sites such as YouTube, with promotion of the videos on Facebook and Twitter.

Within 10 days of launching, total video views exceeded 1 million. The video *Transparency* was featured as a YouTube home page exclusive and generated 600,000 views in its first three days. The top-viewed video, *Psycho*, was YouTube's most viewed video in its nonprofit and activism category.

- The viewer feedback showed that the videos raised awareness and interest in helping the cause.
- The cause was good.
- The delivery channel capitalized on the reach of social media.
- And the narrative was compelling.

The tagline under PSI's logo states: "Healthy Lives. Measurable Results." But could the sponsors be certain that money was well spent on public relations based only on the measurement of media exposure and anecdotal praise from viewers? Using the measurement guidelines from this chapter, what would you recommend to PSI that would enhance substantive evaluation of these sorts of communication programs in the future?

Source: PRWeek, www.prweekus.com/awards

Once you start comparing a PR placement to an ad, that raises a whole spectrum of issues.

Don Bartholomew, director of research at MWW Group

no empirical evidence to support any multiple factor. Professor Don Stacks at the University of Miami has conducted several research studies about AVE and concluded, "We failed to find the existence of a multiplier." The Institute for Public Relations (IPR) was even blunter. In a policy paper, IPR called the use of multipliers "unethical, dishonest, and not at all supported by research literature."

Despite such condemnation, many publicists still use AVE and multiplier formulas. News photos of President Obama drinking a Guinness beer during a trip to Ireland, for example, were touted by one UK publicist as being worth $32 million in worldwide publicity for Guinness. Corporate practitioners rationalize the use of AVE because they say it is a form of return on investment (ROI). It shows management that the public relations staff is earning its salary by generating more "income" than it costs to pay their salaries.

Comparing news coverage (called earned media) with advertising, however, is like comparing apples and oranges. One reason why the two can't be compared is the fundamental difference between advertising and publicity. Advertising copy is directly controlled by the organization and can be oriented to specific objectives. The organization also controls the size and placement of the message. News mentions, on the other hand, are determined by media gatekeepers and can be negative, neutral, or positive. In addition, a news release can be edited to the point that key corporate messages are deleted. In other words, the organization can't control size, placement, or content.

The most important concern is that AVEs concentrate on outputs, not outcomes. AVE tends to relegate public relations to a media relations function, which diminishes the role of public relations' strategic counsel to upper management when decisions are made, not just when they are publicized. At the same time, equating publicity with advertising rates for comparable space does not engender good media relations. The technique reinforces the opinion of many media gatekeepers that all news releases are just attempts to get free advertising.

In summary, the **dollar-value** approach to measuring publicity effectiveness is rapidly declining as a metric. Andre Manning, head of global communications for Philips Electronics, told *PRWeek*, "The PR practitioner who says, 'We got 500 hits, which generated 250 impressions with an AVE of $2 million' is a thing of the past." The winning campaigns in PRSA's Silver Anvil awards, for example, rarely used AVE as a major criterion to demonstrate the success of a campaign. Instead, the emphasis is on outcomes such as increased sales, awareness, change in attitudes or behavior, and contribution to overall corporate objectives.

Systematic Tracking

As noted earlier, message exposure traditionally has been measured by sheer bulk. New advances in computer software and databases, however, now make it possible to track media placements in a more sophisticated way.

Systems can now analyze the content of media placements by such variables as market penetration, type of publication, tone of coverage, sources quoted, and mention of key copy points. Ketchum, for example, can build up to 40 variables into its computer program, including the tracking of reporter bylines to determine whether a journalist is predisposed negatively or positively to the client's key messages.

on the job

ETHICS

The New Math: Ad Rates versus News Coverage

You've been hired as an intern at a public relations firm for the summer. One of your duties is to go through recent online issues of trade magazines and "clip" any article in which the name of a client appears. You are then asked to look up advertising rates for these publications and calculate what the comparable space in advertising would cost. The public relations firm routinely triples the ad cost because a news story is more "valuable" than an ad.

The idea, says the account supervisor, is to count entire articles even if the client's name is mentioned only once. "The client is impressed with big numbers," she says, "so count anything you can find, get the actual ad cost, and then triple it." You ask whether you should also try to judge whether the coverage is favorable or not. Your supervisor says that all the client really wants is to be visible—and besides, it takes too much time to decide what is favorable or unfavorable coverage.

Does AVE raise any ethical concerns on your part? Why or why not? How would you handle the assignment? Would you be inclined to suggest to your boss that Weighted Media Equivalency might be worth considering?

Specialty measurement firms such as Vocus, Visible Technologies, and Factiva do extensive analysis for a variety of clients on a number of metrics such as (1) analysis of coverage telling how a company's news coverage compares with that of the competition, (2) share of voice in terms of what percentage of overall coverage about an industry or subject focuses on the client company, (3) tone showing whether the slant of coverage is positive or negative, (4) percentage of time that stories mention key messages, and (5) analysis of what third-party experts, consumers, and bloggers say about the organization. See Figure 8.3 for sample charts compiled with Vocus software about the athletic shoe market for use in this textbook.

Systematic monitoring can provide a baseline to determine whether an organization's publicity efforts paid off in terms of placements and mention of key messages. Essentially, a baseline study is a measurement of audience response (awareness, understanding, or attitudes and opinions) before, during, and after a public relations campaign. Baseline studies can graphically show the percentage difference in measured audience performance as a result of public relations campaign components.

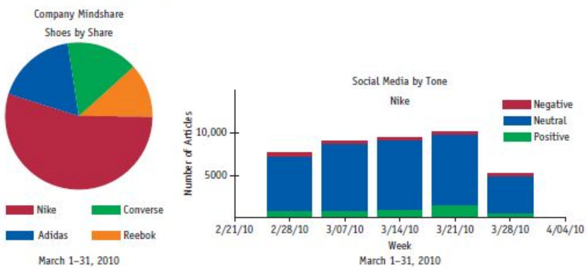
For example, the Johnson & Johnson public service campaign to increase parental awareness of dangers to children in swimming pools used a baseline survey by Harris Interactive before its campaign. Post-campaign research found that awareness of pool-drain hazards increased from 26 to 32 percent.

Another form of analysis compares the number of news releases sent with the number actually published and in what kinds of periodicals. Such analysis often helps a public relations department determine what kinds of publicity are most effective and earn the most ROI. Over time, findings can also indicate what publications tend to use news releases from the organization.

> The world doesn't need more data. What it needs is analyzed data.
>
> *Katharine Paine, president of KD Paine & Partners*

Figure 8.3 Measuring Results in the Athletic Shoe Industry

Public relations software and research firms are able to capture enormous amounts of data over time, which are then encapsulated in graphics that inform evaluation of measurable objectives. For example, if Nike had set the objective of leading the top four shoe manufacturers in share of media mentions, the Company Mindshare chart would demonstrate success at a glance. If the objective were to hold negative comments to a minimum among bloggers and tweeters, the Social Media by Tone chart would show a small red band of negative comments compared to the large sections of neutral and positive comments.



Requests and 800 Numbers

Another measure of media exposure is to compile the number of requests for more information. A story in a newspaper or a company spokesperson on a broadcast often tells people where they can get more information about a subject. In addition, part of Web analytics is how many people download a video or a "brochure" from a website.

In many cases, a toll-free 800 number is provided. Dayton Hudson Corporation, owner of several department store chains, once used a toll-free hotline number as part of its "Child Care Aware" program to help educate parents about quality child care and how to get it. In a six-month period, 19,000 calls were received from people seeking advice and copies of a brochure.

Requests for materials also can show the effectiveness of a public relations program. An information program by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control on AIDS prevention, for example, received nearly 2,000 phone calls on its information hotline after its "Safe Sex" program was broadcast by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). In addition, the program and resulting publicity generated 260 requests for videos and 400 requests for "Smart Sex" organization kits.

Return on Investment (ROI)

Another way to evaluate exposure to a message is to determine the cost of reaching each member of the audience. The technique is commonly used in advertising to place costs in perspective. Although a 30-second commercial during the Super Bowl telecast costs millions, advertisers believe it is well worth the price because an audience of more than 100 million is reached for less than a half-cent each.

Cost-effectiveness, as this technique is known, is also used in public relations. *Cost-per-thousand* (CPM) is calculated by taking the cost of the publicity program and dividing it by the total media impressions (discussed earlier). Nike produced a sports video for $50,000, but reached 150,000 high school students, for a per-person cost of 33 cents.

Many professionals also call this ROI, or return on investment. In other words, if an organization spends $500,000 on a campaign that results in a $20 million increase in sales, the ROI is 40 times the cost. Increasingly, public relations professionals are measuring public relations in terms of (1) what sales or revenues are generated, and (2) how much they have saved the company in terms of avoiding a crisis or litigation.

> It was clear to us that you can't go and ask for money . . . unless you can show a return. You can't show a return unless you have measurement.
>
> *Valerie M. Cunningham, VP of corporate marketing for Xerox*

Measurement of Audience Awareness

Thus far, techniques of measuring audience exposure and accurate dissemination have been discussed. A higher level of evaluation is needed to determine whether the audience actually became aware of the message and understood it.

Walter Lindenmann calls this the second level of public relations evaluation. He notes:

> At this level, public relations practitioners measure whether target audience groups actually received the messages directed at them: whether they paid attention to those messages, whether they understood the messages, and whether they have retained those messages in any shape or form.

The tools of survey research are needed to answer such questions. Members of the target audience must be asked about the message and what they remember about it. Public awareness of the organization which sponsors an event is also important. The internationally recognized advocacy group Health Literacy Missouri conducts annual surveys of media in the state to assess awareness of the organization, but, more importantly, of health literacy as a crucial factor in the health and well-being of everyday citizens.

Measuring audience awareness and comprehension with *day-after recall* offers a credible metric for evaluating the impact of a campaign component. Participants are asked to view a specific television program or read a particular news story. The next day, they are interviewed to find out which messages they remember.

Ketchum, on behalf of the California Prune Board, used this technique to determine whether a 15-city media tour was conveying the key message that prunes are a high-fiber food source. Forty women in Detroit considered likely to watch daytime television shows were asked to view a program on which a Prune Board spokesperson appeared. The day after the program, Ketchum asked the women questions about the show, including their knowledge of the fiber content of prunes. Ninety-three percent remembered the Prune Board spokesperson, and 65 percent, on an unaided basis, named prunes as a high-fiber food source.

Measurement of Audience Attitudes

Closely related to audience awareness and understanding of a message are changes in an audience's perceptions and attitudes, which can be evaluated using pre- and post-measurements of attitudes. A number of intervening variables may account for changes in attitude, of course, but statistical analysis of variance can help pinpoint how much the change is attributable to public relations efforts. Advanced evaluation designs can even control for the effect of all the measurement, which has its own impact on audiences.

The insurance company Prudential Financial regularly conducts baseline studies. One survey found that the company scored high in respondent familiarity, but achieved only a 29 percent favorable rating in fulfilling its corporate social responsibilities. As a result, the company launched The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, the United States' largest youth-recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service. The value of the baseline survey is underscored by Frank R. Stansberry, former manager of guest affairs for Coca-Cola, who said, "The only way to determine if communications are making an impact is by pre- and posttest research. The first survey measures the status quo. The second one will demonstrate any change and the direction of that change."

Measurement of Audience Action

The ultimate objective of any public relations effort, as has been pointed out, is to accomplish organizational objectives. As David Dozier of San Diego State University aptly points out, "The outcome of a successful public relations program is not a hefty stack of news stories. . . . Communication is important only in the effects it achieves among publics."

The objective of an amateur theater group is not to get media publicity; the objective is to sell tickets. The objective of an environmental organization such as Greenpeace is not to get publicity on behalf of whales, but to motivate the public to (1) write to elected officials, (2) send donations for preservation efforts, and (3) get protective legislation passed that actually saves whales.

Similarly, the ultimate objective of a company is to sell its products and services, not get 200 million media impressions. See the Insights box which follows for more information about linking sales to measurements. Although the immediate objective of many public relations campaigns is to raise awareness driven by the number of media placements and impressions, such campaigns should be seen in the context of the adoption theory that was described in Chapter 7. In other words, raising awareness and raising interest are the first two steps of the five-step process to ultimately motivate people to adopt an idea, vote for a candidate, use a service, or buy a product.

Thus, public relations efforts ultimately are evaluated on how they help an organization achieve its objectives. For example, Suave's celebration of Hispanic style tracked increased awareness as mentioned previously, but the campaign also touted the increase in product trial for the Suave Professionals line:

- Sales were lifted by 12.6 percent at 24 test stores.
- Suave Styling Aids sold at a 14.3 percent increase where the campaign's celebrity stylist, Rocco, appeared prior to the television award show.
- Measuring Success: The Cookie Careavan evaluation plan offers a clear example of how components of a campaign are itemized and plans are made in advance for measurement.

> The outcome of a successful public relations program is not a hefty stack of news stories. . . . Communication is important only in the effects it achieves among publics.
>
> *Dr. David Dozier, professor, San Diego State University*

PRCasebook

Ketchum's Evaluation of the DoubleTree CAREavan

The four process chapters culminate with evaluation of the research, the plan, and the communication. For the Ketchum Public Relations campaign to celebrate the hospitality of DoubleTree Hotels by Hilton, several components of the national tour serve to showcase key points in this evaluation chapter:

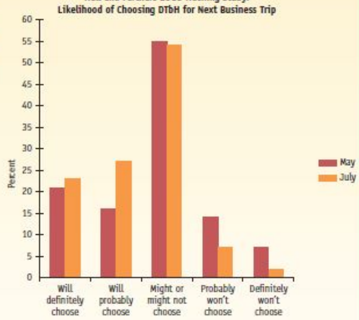
- the importance of setting clear, measurable objectives for the campaign (informational and motivational)
- the role of measurement for social media tactics in contemporary campaigns (buzz, visual impact, spinoff traditional media coverage)
- the measurement of various communication components (from simple awareness to membership decision)

Ketchum used plain language in the objectives section of its plan, describing what success would look like. Overarching goals were brand awareness and brand engagement. Success metrics included the following, with blue annotations to point to particularly notable evaluation measures:

Cookies distributed/attendees at cookie events [an indicator of event participation]

- Media coverage:
  - Overall media impressions [a calculation of potential reader and viewer numbers based on tracking of media coverage and audience for media outlets]
  - Message quality: percentage of key message in resulting impressions [content analysis of the coverage to confirm campaign story was being told]
- Social media buzz:
  - Social Media ROI Score
  - Increase in online ecosystem
  - Terms "Cookie," "CARE," or additional defined terms rank higher in the overall ecosystem
  - Increase in DoubleTree by Hilton (DTbH) Twitter and Facebook followers and "Likes" [a measure of actual communication behavior, moving the campaign beyond mere awareness and understanding to favorable attitude toward the brand]
  - Facebook tab analytics (clicks, engagement, photo submissions, etc.)
- Visits to online platforms (DTbH website, Facebook, Twitter, etc.): Create deeper engagement by driving consumers to online platforms where they can interact with the brand [the use of Web analytics, such as which sites drive visitors and landing page activity to confirm the tour, led to greater engagement with the DoubleTree brand]
- HHonors sign-ups: Educate consumers on HHonors benefits and drive sign-ups through

Hall and Partners 2011 Tracking Study: Likelihood of Choosing DTbH for Next Business Trip



(continued)

event activities and overall messaging. Note that Ketchum will need to work with DTbH to determine the best way to capture CAREavan-driven HHonors sign-ups [although actual behavior such as enrolling in a program is often the trickiest to attribute directly to a campaign, the case is worth making; conversion of tour visitors into members of the Hilton awards program impacts the bottom line for Hilton by increasing likely hotel bookings with the chain]

One of the crucial quantitative evaluation measures of any campaign or public relations program is to provide documentation of how the public relations effort helped the organization achieve its overall objectives. For the Cookie CAREavan for DTbH, the ultimate objective was to increase bookings at the hotels. In the bar graph given next, Ketchum employed a tracking study to present before-and-after statistics about choosing DoubleTree for one's next business trip. The largest and most notable shift in intentions was in the "will probably choose" box, a point that Ketchum would emphasize in presenting results to DoubleTree. To be fully accountable, the evaluation report should also address that among those with low loyalty to DTbH, sentiment fell further. Even so, the focus should be on the larger increase in those likely to choose DoubleTree.

Social media tactics lend themselves to measurement, either directly from analysis of app data or through traceable impacts of social media such as sharing behavior. Driving home campaign impact can be done by displaying video activity during the campaign itself. This adds to the authenticity of facts and figures about the campaign as well as numerical data from sources such as YouTube Insights.

The Silver Anvil from the Public Relations Society of America was fully justified by the completeness of the evaluation component of the campaign submission. Professionals in public relations know that numbers and bar graphs matter more than ever before in evaluating campaigns. But evaluation must also tell the compelling, even moving story of how the communication touched people. This narrative is increasingly one that clients want to see, not simply read. Ketchum professionals on the Cookie CAREavan clearly kept in mind the growing trends toward television over print news and the explosion of video documentation on YouTube. The collage of YouTube clips and comments help confirm the success story being told by the hard data by providing lively, emotional examples of what the DoubleTree cookie means to real people.

Measurement of Supplemental Activities

Other forms of measurement can be used in public relations activities. This section discusses (1) communication audits, (2) pilot tests and split messages, (3) meeting and event attendance, and (4) newsletter readership.

Communication Audits

The entire communication activity of an organization should be evaluated at least once a year to make sure that every primary and secondary public is receiving appropriate messages. David Hilton-Barber, a past president of the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA), once wrote: "The most important reasons for an audit are to help establish communication goals and objectives, to evaluate long-term programs, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to point up any areas which require increased activity."

A communication audit, as an assessment of an organization's entire communications program, could include the following:

- Analysis of all communication activities
- Informal interviews with rank-and-file employees, middle management, and top executives
- Informal interviews with community leaders, media gatekeepers, consumers, distributors, and other influential persons in the industry

A number of research techniques, as outlined in Chapter 5, can be used during a communication audit, including mail and telephone surveys, focus groups, and so forth. The important point is that the communications of an organization should be analyzed from every possible angle, with the input of as many publics as possible.

Pilot Tests and Split Messages

Evaluation is important even before a public relations effort is launched. If exposure to a message is to be maximized, it is wise to pretest it with a sample group from the targeted audience. Do its members easily understand the message? Do they accept the message? Does the message motivate them to adopt a new idea or product?

A variation of pretesting is the *pilot test*. Before going national with a public relations message, companies often test the message and key copy points in selected cities to learn how the media accept the message and how the public reacts. This approach is quite common in marketing public relations because it limits costs and enables the company to revamp or fine-tune the message for maximum exposure. In the new media landscape, with numerous controlled media such as Web and social media platforms, piloting also allows the company to switch channels of dissemination if the original media channels are not exposing the message to the proper audiences.

The *split-message* approach is common in direct mail and direct e-mail campaigns. Two or three different appeals may be prepared by a charitable organization and sent to different audience segments. The response rate is then monitored (perhaps the amount of donations is totaled) to learn what messages and graphics seemed to be the most effective.

Meeting and Event Attendance

Audience awareness is often evaluated by attendance at an event. The crisis prevention campaign for the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis featured in Chapter 6 proudly documented record-breaking attendance at the two-day fund-raising rock concert.

Such data provide information about the number of people exposed to a message, but don't answer the more crucial question of what the audience took away from the meeting.

Public relations people often get an informal sense of an audience's attitudes by its behavior. A standing ovation, spontaneous applause, complimentary remarks as people leave, and even the expressions on people's faces provide clues as to how a meeting was received. On the other hand, if people are not responsive, if they ask questions about subjects supposedly explained, or if they express doubts or antagonism, the meeting can be considered only partly successful.

Public relations practitioners use a number of informal methods to evaluate the success of a meeting, but they also employ more systematic methods. The most common technique is providing an evaluation sheet for participants to fill out at the end of the meeting. Hiring independent evaluators is money well spent for major conferences or annual meetings.

A simple form asking people to rate such items as location, costs, facilities, and program on a 1 to 5 scale (1 being the best) can be used. Other forms may ask people to rate aspects of a conference or meeting as (1) excellent, (2) good, (3) average, (4) poor, or (5) very poor.

Evaluation forms also determine how people heard about the program and what suggestions they have for future meetings. Another approach is to ask attendees whether they heard or believed the key messages of a spokesperson's presentation and whether they would like to receive any follow-up information from the sponsoring organization.

Newsletter Readership

Editors of newsletters, e-newsletters, and internal communication tools such as company magazines should evaluate readership annually. Such an evaluation can help ascertain (1) reader perceptions, (2) the degree to which stories are balanced, (3) the kinds of stories that have high reader interest, (4) additional topics that should be covered, (5) the credibility of the publication, and (6) the extent to which the newsletter is meeting organizational objectives.

Materials can be evaluated in a number of ways. The methods include (1) content analysis, (2) readership-interest surveys, (3) readership recall of articles actually read, and (4) the use of advisory boards.

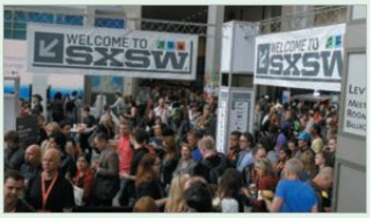
Content Analysis Based on a representative sample of past issues, stories may be categorized under general headings such as (1) management announcements, (2) new product developments, (3) new personnel and retirements, (4) features about employees, (5) corporate finances, (6) news of departments and divisions, and (7) job-related information.

Such a systematic analysis will show what percentage of the publication is devoted to each category. It may be found that one division rarely is covered in the employee newsletter or that management pronouncements tend to dominate the entire publication. Given the content-analysis findings, editors have an empirical basis on which to shift the content.

on the job

SOCIAL MEDIA IN ACTION

Chevy at SXSW: Event Success by the Numbers



Event sponsorship is an integral part of a company's business strategy, but each event must also be evaluated in terms of how it enhances the brand and creates new markets for a product or service.

With this in mind, Chevrolet became a sponsor at the annual South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in Austin, Texas, to position itself as an innovative brand among a younger, more hip audience. It was also an opportunity to show off the technology of its newest models, the Cruze and the Volt, through interaction with festival goers.

A number of interactive activities were planned throughout the festival that included (1) using a Chevy shuttle to get around the grounds, (2) organizing a music showcase featuring new performers, (3) sponsoring an outdoor concert, (4) staffing an exhibit booth, (5) having a Tweet-house panel, and (6) hosting a trivia contest. Social media also played a major role in extending awareness of Chevy's participation in the festival.

The SXSW sponsorship was evaluated according to how well the company's three stated objectives were accomplished. The box score is as follows:

Chevy's successful event at SXSW received a PRSA's Silver Anvil award in the category of marketing consumer products.

OBJECTIVE	RESULTS
Enhance the SXSW experience for festival-goers by way of the brand's role	■ Catch a Chevy provided more than 12,000 rides around the festival.
	■ More than 7,000 people recharged at the Volt Lounge, using power strips and the space to network and spread SXSW across social channels.
	■ Over l6,000 social mentions from festival-goers mentioned Chevy's presence.
Introduce attendees to the brand and new products	■ Social media Web impressions exceeded 53 million.
	■ Chevy added more than 37,000 Facebook fans and more than 2,400 followers on Twitter.
	■ Content efforts generated more than 25,000 page views through Facebook and SXSW .com/Chevrolet.
	■ Chevrolet Foursquare following grew by 3,600—more than 85 percent.
	■ More than 150 traditional media placements, including coverage by NBC, Forbes, and USA Today.
Increase positive brand perception	■ More than 75 percent of the attendees strongly identified with the statement, "Chevrolet is heading in the right direction."
	■ Almost 85 percent of those polled thought Chevy was a good fit for SXSW, referring to auto maker's innovation and eco-friendly products.

Readership-Interest Surveys The purpose of these surveys is to get feedback about the types of stories employees are most interested in reading. The most common survey method is simply to provide a long list of generic story topics and have employees rate each as (1) important, (2) somewhat important, or (3) not important. The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) conducted such a survey on behalf of several dozen companies and found that readers were not very interested in "personals" about other employees (birthdays, anniversaries, and the like).

Article Recall One effective readership survey involves trained interviewers asking a sample of employees what they have read in the latest issue of the publication. Employees are shown the publication page by page and asked to indicate which articles they have read. As a check on the tendency of employees to report that they have read everything, interviewers also ask them (1) how much of each article they have read and (2) what the articles were about. The results are then content-analyzed to determine which kinds of articles have the most readership.

Advisory Boards Periodic feedback and evaluation can be provided by organizing an employee advisory board that meets several times a year to discuss the direction and content of the publication. This is a useful technique because it expands the editor's feedback network and elicits comments that employees might be hesitant to tell the editor face-to-face. A variation of the advisory board method is to occasionally invite a sampling of employees to meet and discuss the publication or website.

Summary

The Purpose of Evaluation

- Evaluation is the measurement of results against objectives in the communication plan.
- One major purpose of evaluation is to do a better job of planning future programs.

Objectives: A Prerequisite for Evaluation

- Objectives should be part of any program plan.
- There must be agreed-upon criteria used to evaluate success in obtaining these objectives.

Current Status of Measurement and Evaluation

- Studies indicate that about 4 or 5 percent of a typical public relations budget is allocated to evaluations and measurement.
- On the most basic level, practitioners can measure message distribution and media placements. The second level is measurement of audience awareness, comprehension, and retention. The most advanced level is the measurement of changes in attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

Measurement of Production

- The most elementary form of measurement is a tabulation of how many news releases, brochures, annual reports, and so on, are distributed in a single year.
- Measurement of production gives management an idea of a staff's productivity and output.

Measurement of Message Exposure

- Several criteria can be used to measure message exposure, including the compilation of media placements in print, broadcast, and Internet media.
- One common method is calculating media impressions—the potential audience reached with a message. Advertising value equivalency, commonly called AVE, is calculated by converting news stories to the cost of a comparable amount of paid space.
- More sophisticated methods include systematic tracking using software and databases to find out such information as tone of coverage, percentage of key messages used, and percentage of coverage related to that of the competition.

- Sometimes, exposure is evaluated by determining how much it costs to reach each member of the target audience.

Measurement of Audience Awareness

- The next level of evaluation is whether the audience became aware of and understood the message.
- Audience awareness can be measured through survey research, which, by having the audience engage in unaided recall, can determine whether the audience understood and remembered the message.

Measurement of Audience Attitudes

- Changes in audience attitudes can be evaluated through a baseline or benchmark study, which measures awareness and opinions before, during, and after a public relations campaign.

Measurement of Audience Action

- Ultimately, public relations campaigns are evaluated based on how they help an organization achieve its objectives through changing audience behavior, whether that involves sales, fund-raising, or the election of a candidate.

Measurement of Supplemental Activities

- A yearly communication audit helps ensure that all publics are receiving appropriate messages. Several techniques, such as pilot tests and split messages, can be used to pretest a public relations effort.
- Meeting and event attendance can be measured both by the number of attendees and by their behavior, which is an indicator of their acceptance of a message.
- Newsletter readership can be evaluated by content analysis, interest surveys, and article recall.

Case Activity Evaluating the Success of Tourism Promotion

The Mexico Tourist Board has hired your youth-oriented public relations agency to boost bookings to Mexican resorts for college spring breaks and high school senior trips. A big part of your challenge is to assure parents who often pay the travel bill that Mexico is a safe destination. The bottom-line objective for the tourist board is the increased bookings. The board also wants to dispel the misimpression that drug-gang violence occurs in resort towns. How will you develop a set of evaluation criteria starting with awareness and working through the types of evaluation covered in this chapter to make the case that your campaign offered a good return on investment through significant upticks in flights to Mexico and bookings at beach resorts?

Questions For Review and Discussion

1. What is the role of stated objectives in evaluating public relations programs?
2. What are some general types of evaluation questions that a person should ask about a program?
3. List four ways that publicity activity is evaluated. What, if any, are the drawbacks of each one?
4. Do you think news stories about a product or service should be evaluated in terms of comparable advertising costs? Why or why not?
5. What are the various methods used in measuring public relations efforts?
6. How are pilot tests and split messages used to determine the suitability of a message?
7. What are media impressions? How are these measured?
8. What is the relative importance of ROI to a public relations client?
9. What is a communication audit? What should a communication audit ideally include?

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