

EVALUATING PR CAMPAIGNS

Evaluating PR campaigns is difficult. Marketing managers spend huge amounts of time and effort, but when the order arrives, it's always the sales team that gets the glory! This white paper explains different approaches to demonstrating the impact of PR and concludes that you might already know the best way to evaluate your results.

OUTPUT, OUT TAKE OR OUTCOME?

PR professionals talk about *outputs* – the activities that were undertaken in the campaign; *out takes* – the result of these tactics, for example the increase in the awareness of the company and its products amongst the target audience; and *outcomes* – the changes in behaviour as a result of the campaign, for example an increase in the products purchased by the customer.

Measuring outputs such as the number of press releases issued is meaningless if the releases generate no coverage and therefore result in no positive out takes or outcomes. So, as a general rule, the further down the chain towards the outcomes of the campaign, the better the evaluation, but the more difficult it is to measure.

CUTTINGS

The classic “press clippings book” is perhaps the simplest way to evaluate the outputs. By flicking through the clippings, it's fairly easy to see the volume of coverage and also to make some estimate of quality.

REACH

Reach measures how many people in the target audience will have seen the campaign. Although it's possible to calculate the percentage of the target audience that will be reached, often the readership or circulation of all the publications that covered the campaign is added up to simplify things.

It's hard to estimate the number of people who see online coverage as publishers don't release the views for specific pages, so online reach has to be estimated based upon overall site traffic.

FREQUENCY

Many studies have shown that marketing messages must be communicated several times if they are to have any impact. Frequency is therefore a great measure, and can be applied to a subset of the total target audience: for example 10% of the target audience saw the message 4 or more times.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SEE (OTS)

Opportunities to see (OTS) is a more effective way of measuring how many of the target audience will see the campaign's message, combining elements of frequency and reach to represent the number of times that an average member of the target audience is likely to have seen the campaign.

SHARE OF VOICE

Share of voice takes a simple approach: rather than setting a bottom-up goal for the outputs, it simply benchmarks the campaign against those of competitors. Share of voice can be measured in specific publications, allowing evaluation of the outputs in the most influential media channels.

ASSIGNING FINANCIAL VALUE – AVE

PR costs money, so it's natural that companies would like to calculate a monetary value for the results that it achieves – the cost of advertising to achieve the same results. However, studies have shown that PR is far more effective than advertising, so multiples of the rate card cost are used to create the advertising value equivalent (AVE). There is huge variation in the multiplier used: the PRCA recommends three, but some agencies multiply by seven or more with little justification for the multiplier selected.

There are many reasons why AVE is considered a poor measure: PR isn't advertising, publications don't always charge rate card, there's no assessment of quality and the choice of multiplier is generally pretty arbitrary. AVE, however, is a bit like fast food: we know we shouldn't but its convenience and the superficial feeling of satisfaction when you get a value for your campaign's results mean it gets used far too often.

MEASURING EDITORIAL IMPACT

Editorial impact measurement looks at several factors including the credibility and relevance of the media; where the coverage appeared and how big the article was; how many people in the target audience would see the coverage; the quality of those people; and the tone of the article. By using a scoring system, a number can be produced to assess the editorial impact of the campaign on a weekly or monthly basis, with the trend providing insight into whether the campaign is getting more or less effective.

SURVEYS

If a survey is conducted before and after the campaign, an improvement in attitudes to the company should be seen. However, it can be difficult to isolate the impact of the PR element particularly in a B2B technology campaign that uses a variety of marketing and sales activities.

MAKE IT UP – YOUR OWN METRICS

You probably already know the best way to evaluate your PR, because you know what you want to achieve. By developing specific objectives, which can range from “get journalist y to mention us whenever he writes about technology x” to “make the majority of the target audience think our products are better than competitor z”, evaluating the campaign can move from graphs of arbitrary numbers to talking about real-world business objectives. The more closely you can link your evaluation to the objectives of the company, the more likely you are to convince the CEO that the marketing campaign worked and that you did a great job!