

## Preface

*“We talk about the quality of product and service. What about the quality of our relationships, and the quality of our communications and the quality of our promises to each other?” — Max De Pree*

*Once upon a time* not very long ago, there was a state university in a small town in New Hampshire. Both the university and the town needed new soccer fields. One of the university's alumni, a successful local entrepreneur, stepped forward and offered to donate \$6 million so the university could build them. A site was selected, town officials were notified, and the university assumed it would soon be hosting soccer tournaments.

Now the university was a venerable institution, and it took care to maintain its reputation of quality and prestige by communicating about itself to the world. But it failed to understand that some very important changes had been occurring in the town. For much of the university's history, most of the people who lived in the town year round either worked for the university, or had family or friends involved there. Over recent decades, however, rising real estate prices and property taxes had forced much of the faculty and staff out of town. Their houses were bought up by retirees and commuters who had no particular connection with the university. So the town's permanent residents, who had once formed a sympathetic constituency, gradually changed into an inactive, disengaged public. The university's reputation with this new public was still fine, but the strength of its connection with them was now different—unmeasured and untested.

Several years before the soccer fields were planned, the university had embarked on a different large construction project, a 6000-seat sports and entertainment arena. The university, a tax-exempt and local zoning-exempt state entity, chose to simply notify the townspeople of their plans. They completely failed to anticipate that the town's permanent residents might object to potential parking problems or the absence of any local tax benefits. As a result, many townspeople felt railroaded by the university and their town officials, and, after a contentious political campaign, replaced their town leadership. Over the course of

Measuring Success: The Data-Driven Communicator's Guide to Measuring Public Relationships  
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that campaign a powerful grassroots organization developed, joined together by an influential email list 2000 names strong.

Now let's skip ahead a couple years to the soccer fields proposal. The university, despite its strong public relations department, had been making no effort to understand the concerns of its constituencies. It was unaware that a good part of the town's permanent residents had become well-organized and were potentially quite hostile. When the university announced their new construction project, the reaction was swift, noisy and disastrous. The citizen's group and other opponents got the attention of the statewide media, and used email and their listserv to ensure that every University trustee and every politician heard their complaints.

Less than two months after being announced the proposed soccer fields were cancelled, the \$6 million gift was rejected and the university president stepped down. It was a stiff price to pay for misunderstanding one's publics. What went wrong?

Some argue that the university in the previous example should have just paid more attention to its PR. And it should have. But the missing concept here is more complex than communications, or even reputation. What the university failed to understand or evaluate was the mutual affinity that existed (or not) between itself and the townspeople. It failed to understand its *relationship* with them.

\* \* \*

Those of us in communications and marketing have all felt an increased demand for more relevant and accurate measures of success. Slogans like "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it" adorn offices around the globe, and everyone who communicates for a living is feeling pressure to demonstrate just how they are helping advance the organization's mission.

For almost two decades I've studied and measured communications programs for organizations. Many of those were based in public relations or media relations. Others were focused on employee communications or events or trade shows. I've figured out how to measure successes in many shapes and forms. The one common denominator in all those programs has been relationships—lots of different types of relationships with lots of different constituencies.

In many organizations, marketing and communications is seen as a tool to improve corporate or brand

reputation. And, while most of us in the PR business are convinced that it *does* contribute, trying to tie a specific activity back to overall brand reputation tends to be a frustrating and time-consuming experience, undertaken mostly by large organizations with hefty research budgets. I am convinced that the key to understanding reputation is measuring the relationships that it is based on.

Whether you work for a Fortune 500 international powerhouse or run a local non-profit, you share a common interest in the relationships you have with your constituencies. Building, managing and measuring those relationships is fundamental to your success and the success of your organization.

As our world has become more electronic and in many ways less personal, the importance of those relationships has increased. Our new and efficient communication technologies sometimes operate to the detriment of relationships both interpersonal and organizational. For some organizations it is becoming a matter of survival to understand how to measure and better manage their relationships. If you can measure your relationships you can improve them, and improved relationships will bring you and your organization increased efficiencies, greater effectiveness and improved overall performance.

This book has grown from my experience in designing and implementing measurement systems. It is based on hundreds of real life stories of how organizations have used measurement to improve their reputations, strengthen their bottom line, and improve efficiencies all around. The following pages provide you with tools, tips, techniques and experiences that illustrate how to measure your success, and specifically the success of your relationships. This is a book that every professional communicator can use—whether he or she works for Procter & Gamble or for a small local non-profit—to improve their work and the organization they work for. Here's wishing you great measures of success. -KDP

# Chapter 1: An Introduction to Measurement

*“I can think of nothing more gallant, even though again and again we fail, than attempting to get at the facts; attempting to tell things as they really are. For at least reality, though never fully attained, can be defined. Reality is that which, when you don't believe in it, doesn't go away.” —Peter Viereck*

## Why Measure Relationships?

Let's be perfectly clear. If all you want to do is measure your media relations program, you can skip ahead right to Chapter 4. That's not what public relations measurement is all about. Too often those of us who consider ourselves PR professionals forget that the second word in our title is “relations,” as in the relationships you have with various publics. PR is the process of building and enhancing relationships with key constituencies. Particularly in this day and age where conversations with key stakeholders are critical to your survival, the importance of good relationships with key publics can't be underestimated.

## Relationships versus Reputation

In the last decade there's been a lot of attention focused on the measurement and evaluation of corporate reputation. While investors, shareholders and management consultants are all legitimately concerned with reputation, I argue that evaluating your reputation is largely a waste of time. To put it another way: Just because you can measure it, does *not* mean you can manage it. Sure, you can count the number of times the media mentions your company as a good place to work, or as socially responsible. But if you are mishandling the relationships behind your reputation, all those messages are not grounded in reality, and ultimately you will have a problem on your hands.

The difficulty with reputation measurement is that it is a too-simplistic look at corporate relationships. As we will see in the chapters ahead, relationships between an organization and its publics are made up

of several independent and measurable components. If you want to have a prayer of influencing your reputation, you first need to understand and measure the relationships behind it.

That measurement can take a number of forms. The simplest and least costly might be an analysis of local and regional blogs to see what people are saying. The traditional media are also a good bellwether of local sentiment. To truly quantify the health of your relationships, however, you will need to conduct a statistically valid survey based on the Grunig Relationship Survey (see Appendix 1).

It almost always makes good economic sense to continuously measure your relationships. Healthy relationships pay off in reduced legal fees, lower turnover, higher customer loyalty and greater efficiencies. And bad relationships are costly in the extreme.

Consider the example of the university and small town given in the Preface. The irony there is that the university is home to a prestigious business school, known for its polling and survey capabilities. The cost to actually measure town/gown relationships would have been minimal. And compared to the loss of a \$6 million gift, the ROI would have been off the charts.

## **To Manage Reputation You Must Measure Relationships**

The reputation of your company or organization is a product of all of your relationships with all your constituencies. So managing those relationships effectively is key to a successful public relations program. And you can't manage relationships unless you measure them.

As warm and fuzzy as it might sound, relationships are highly measurable. The breakthrough work of Drs. James and Laurie Grunig and Linda Hon has provided working definitions of what relationships are and proven survey methodologies to measure them. This book shows how the Grunig survey, combined with media analysis and other tools, provides the means to measure and understand relationships with each of your constituencies.

While every PR program is different, all professional communicators have a core set of key publics that they need to build relationships with, collectively known as the stakeholders:

Their community

The medias

The employees

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Their customers

Local communities and elected officials

Their distributors or sales force

Each group of stakeholders requires slightly different measurement tools and slightly different metrics, which is why we've organized this book around the stakeholders, rather than just give you a list of measurement tools and techniques. When you're done reading this book, you'll know how to measure any and all relationships that your job entails.

This book is also organized around the three categories of the results of public relations efforts: outputs, outtakes and outcomes. Outputs are the physical results (like clippings or brochures), outtakes are how people think as a result of experiencing the outputs (typically measured with a survey) and outcomes are how people behave as a result of the outputs (like buying or recommending a product). See the definitions in Chapter 2 for more discussion of these terms.

Outtakes and outcomes are both measures of relationships. In a good relationship, one person "takes away" from an interaction the feeling or perception that the other wants them to have. In a bad relationship, one person ignores the other, or thinks differently. For outcomes, if people have a good relationship, then they behave in ways that are mutually beneficial.

### **Relationships and Organizational Excellence**

In the IABC Excellence Study (see the IABC website <http://www.iabc.com/rf/reports.htm>), Grunig, Grunig and Dozier conclusively showed that the role of public relations in truly excellent companies was to manage relationships between the organization and its key constituencies. The more an organization focused on relationships, the more "excellent" the organization was.

That's all well and good in theory, and I truly believe that most CEOs do fund corporate communications departments with that in mind, but many of the corporate communications people we've interviewed in the last decade inevitably say that they are paid to something very different, starting with "get good press," followed by "get my CEO's name in print," "keep us out of the headlines," "communicate our message," etc.

If you start with a misunderstanding about goals between top management and the front line practitioners, measurement will never reflect the goals of the organization, no matter how or what you measure.

So if excellent companies need excellent corporate communications departments, and excellent corporate communications departments are focused on managing relationships, clearly the 50+ percent of corporate communications departments that are now measuring success by column inches need to change their measures of success. Which is why we are seeing more and more organizations moving from simple media metrics like clip counts and column inches to more sophisticated reputation and relationship measures. It's not that one type of measure is inherently better than the other; it's that if you don't incorporate and integrate the output measures with the outcome measures, you will never truly understand what impact you are having on your organization.

## **Why Measure At All?**

When budgets are flush, it doesn't much matter how you measure results, as long as there is a perfunctory number that shows up next to your department every so often. But times aren't always flush, and the bean counters are getting more demanding.

Today, most professional communicators have heard the call for accountability, yet, few know how to answer it. The standard response a dozen years ago was, to quote David Ogilvy, "I know half of my communications is working. I just don't know which half." To say today that communications is intangible or too "warm and fuzzy" to be measured is no longer an acceptable answer. So more and more communications professionals struggle to figure out what to measure and how to fit measurement and evaluation into already tight budgets.

I entered the field of corporate communications via journalism, so I had little practical knowledge of communications tactics and strategies. I asked a lot of questions like where we got the bang for the buck or which was the cheapest cost per message communicated between two different strategies. Since no one seemed to have the answers at their fingertips, I developed systems to get the data. Those systems are described in detail in the following chapters.

But along the line I learned that measuring your success is not just another buzzword that follows Six Sigma, TQM (Total Quality Management) and paradigm shifts. It is a key strategic tool that helps you better manage your resources, your department, and your career. There are half a dozen advantages to setting up a measurement program no matter where you are:

## **Reason # 1 to Measure Results:**

### **Data Driven PR Rules**

Making decisions based on data saves time and boosts your credibility. When faced with tough decisions, you'll never find your board of directors or CEO relying on hunches or gut instinct. Chances are any decisions made at the highest level of your company will be made following extensive research.

So why should public relations and/or corporate communications be any different? How credible would your CFO be if he got up in front of the board and said "I know we're making money because I see checks coming in?"

Just as the CFO relies on data to give advice and make recommendations, you need data to decide where, when and how to allocate resources.

## **Reason # 2 to Measure Results:**

### **It helps preserve budget and staff**

I once used a competitive media analysis to indicate the need for a PR staff for a major semiconductor company. We analyzed the client's presence in key media vs. three competitors to determine who was earning the greatest share of ink. As it happened, over a two year period there was very little difference between the competitors, with each of the four organizations earning about 25% share of ink each month. But the client's results took a dive in September. All of a sudden its share of ink dropped to about 2%. I presented the results and asked the audience, that included about fourteen Martians and two Venutians, what had happened. The answer: "That was when we reorganized and eliminated our PR effort."

I replied by demonstrating that in the following months the market had about nine times more opportunities to see news about the competition's products than their own. The last I heard, the PR staff was up to about 10 people and their budget was growing every year.

## **Reason #3 to Measure Results:**

### **Gain a better understanding of the competition**

Whether you are competing for share of market, share of wallet, or share of voice, in today's fast-paced environment you need to know how you stack up against your peers and rivals. Measurement gives you



insight into competitive strengths and weaknesses.

#### **Reason #4 to Measure Results:**

##### **Strategic planning**

Deciding how to best allocate resources is arguably the most important responsibility of any communications manager. But without data you are forced to rely on gut instinct. And as accurate as your gut may be, it doesn't translate very well into Martian. Besides, you and your gut and all of your persuasive abilities aren't going to do anyone any good if you are not in the board room where budgets get decided. What you need is data. Data that tells you where and how to communicate key messages, to impact your reputation and to effect outcomes. Only with such data can you most effectively allocate your resources.

#### **Reason #5 to Measure Results:**

##### **Measurement reveals strengths and weaknesses**

Measurement isn't something you should do because you're forced to. It should be approached as an essential, strategic tool to more effectively get your messages out.

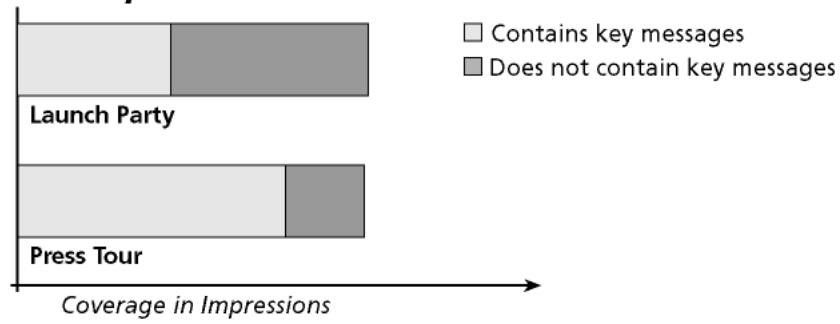
One of my first experiences with measurement was at Lotus Development. I was nearing the end of my first year at Lotus and in order to determine what worked and what didn't work during the year, we gathered the 2400 or so articles that mentioned Lotus during the previous year and analyzed each one to determine whether it left a reader more or less likely to purchase Lotus software, and whether it contained one or more of our key messages. Since I was clearly too close to the process and could spot a key message a mile away, I hired a twenty-something college student who was in the market for software to analyze each article.

The results were very revealing. The \$350,000 launch (with major party) of a word processing product generated a bunch of coverage, but very few of those articles contained our key messages. In fact, a \$15,000 press tour was much more effective at getting key messages to our target audiences. The metric we used to measure success was Cost Per Message Communicated (CPMC), and the press tour delivered a CPMC of \$.02 compared to the party's CPMC of \$1.50. See Figure 1.1,

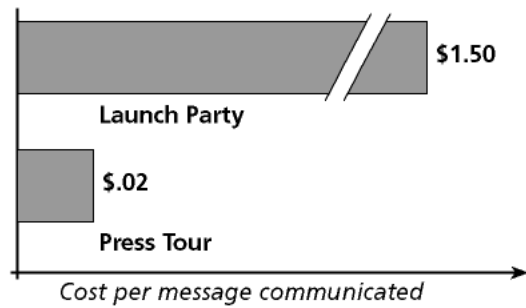
Even more revealing was when we looked at our success in penetrating new markets. We were targeting the bigger mainframe software buyers with a product that enabled them to easily move data from mainframes

**Figure 1.1:**  
Media analysis is one way to demonstrate what works and what doesn't.

**Launch Party and Press Tour Effectiveness Compared with Impressions**



**Launch Party and Press Tour Effectiveness Compared with Cost per Message Communicated**



When we analyzed the results, we realized that this new group of journalists had not responded well at all to our pitch, and in fact, their stories were only half as likely to contain key messages. I called a few of these journalists and it turned out that the person responsible for outreach to this group of reporters had been very unresponsive to their calls. Further investigation revealed that when I'd made the initial assignment, the staff member had perceived, incorrectly, that the assignment was a demotion. By stressing the importance of this audience, we were able to turn her performance around.

Another example involved a client who had us compare the results of two separate press introductions—a press tour and a press conference—to determine which technique was more effective. The results varied little in terms of quantity. In terms of quality, however, the press tour received nearly twice as much positive press and communicated almost twice as many messages, all for a fraction of the cost of the press conference.

I showed my client a chart like Figure 1.2 to demonstrate unequivocally that press tours were more effective than press conferences at getting messages across and generating articles that leave readers more likely to purchase the product. Deciding how to allocate the necessary resources and staff is easier if you know exactly what works and what doesn't.

## **Reason Number 6 to Measure Results:**

### **Measurement gives you reasons to say no**

All too often making decisions based on gut feeling rather than data leads to overworked communicators with unclear priorities. There is simply no good argument for which to say “no.” However, if you can study the results of programs for which timing was rushed or materials were not prepared far enough in advance, you frequently gain the ammunition to just say “no” to one more request.

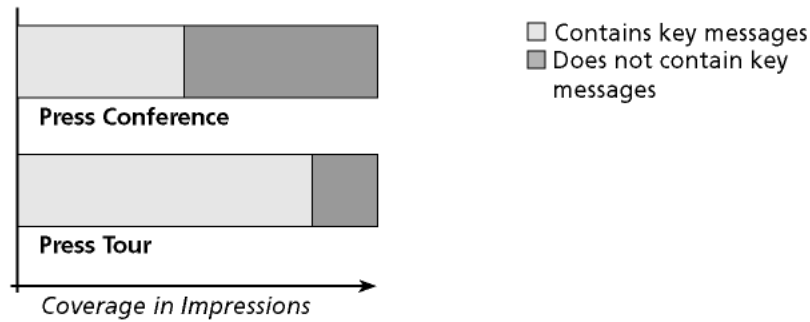
## **Dispelling the Myths of Measurement**

So if accountability is all that important, why isn't everyone already measuring? There are a number of bona fide reasons—lack of knowledge, lack of time, lack of a clear strategy—but most of the so called “reasons” people give stem from a few commonly held myths about measurement.

**Figure 1.2**

Use charts like this to demonstrate what works and what doesn't work.

**Press Tour Generates Almost Twice As Much Key Message Coverage as Press Conference**



## **Myth Number 1:**

### **Measurement = Punishment**

Measurement is not a weapon that your manager uses to check up on you and to justify punishing you. Not only are you never punished for being accountable, in fact, most people who institute measurement programs find that they get more promotions, bigger raises and increased budgets because of their ability to demonstrate success. Why would you be punished for showing how to make your program more efficient, or for having clear and quantifiable ways to figure out what works or doesn't work?

## **Myth Number 2:**

### **Measurement will only create more work for me**

I realize that in the overall scheme of things, measurement seems to many of us as just one more thing in a long list of "high priority" items. Too often it gets dropped to the bottom of the priority list because it seems like too much work. The reality is that once a measurement system is in place, it actually makes everything else much easier.

Data at your fingertips saves time in deciding what media outlets to target, and it saves resources by showing clearly which weaknesses need to be addressed immediately. It helps you better direct the resources you have, ensuring that their efforts are having maximum impact. Data at your disposal means less time debating the merits of one tactic over another. Gut feelings can always be second guessed. Data is much harder to argue with.

## **Myth Number 3:**

### **Measurement is expensive**

The number one reason that people give for not measuring is that they can't afford it. The truth is, you cannot afford not to measure. Without measurement, you have no way of knowing which tactics work and which do not. Hence you don't know if you spent your dollars effectively. A measurement system frequently pays for itself because it inevitably leads to increased efficiency.

One international client of ours called its PR agencies together and showed them the results of our benchmark measurement study of their PR. Based on those results the agencies were given concise new objectives for directing specific messages to specific audiences. Six months later the percentage of the

company's articles that contained key messages had risen by 245 percent. Think of that: A tool that could more than double the exposure of key messages to your target audience. If our client had attempted to gain that exposure with advertising, they would have paid close to \$100,000; instead, the measurement program cost them less than \$10,000.

### **Myth Number 5:**

#### **Measurement is strictly quantitative**

Another myth claims that measurement primarily concerns quantifiable entities: numbers, column inches, total opportunities to see. The reality, however, is that the only type of measurement system that works combines both qualitative and quantitative data. Increasing your press coverage is useless if the right people do not see it or if it communicates the wrong messages.

### **Myth Number 6:**

#### **Measurement is something you do when a program is over**

Measurement is seen too frequently as an afterthought, a tool to gauge the efficiency of a program you completed. On the contrary, in order to be the consummate planning tool, measurement should be in place at the start of a program.

### **Myth Number 7:**

#### **I know what's going on because I see clips coming in**

"I know what's happening, I don't need research." The reality is that you need formal systems to track and evaluate your entire program. Without them you will only be judged on your last headline.

So repeat after me and make measurement your mantra: "Measurement is good. Measurement will not hurt me. Measurement will get me that big raise I've been dreaming about." Repeat five times, then read on...

## **The Ten Questions Every Communications Professional Must Know the Answers To**

The first thing you need to do in order to build internal support and engagement around your measurement program is to walk around your organization, check in with the research groups, customer relations depart-

ments and anywhere there might be internal data that can be used to measure success.

Then make sure you have the answer to the following ten basic questions that any professional communicator should know. If you don't have the answers at your fingertips, go get them.

### **1. What are your corporate objectives?**

You must start with a thorough understanding of your company's business objectives.

### **2. What are your department objectives?**

While it may seem facile and simplistic to actually put this question on the list, it is amazing how many communications professionals I've met with who cannot answer it. Or if they can answer, the objectives are not measurable.

I sometimes help them through the process by asking them to shut their eyes and imagine that it is the end of the year, and they are celebrating enormous success—corks are popping, champagne is flowing, and bonus checks are being passed out to everyone. So: What is it that they are celebrating?

Another way to define your mission is to frame it from the opposite perspective. Suppose your department was wiped out tomorrow, how would the business suffer?

### **3. What are you going to do with the information you get from your research?**

Never ask a question you don't want to hear the answer to. Make sure you can act on all the information you get and can make changes and improve performance as a result. If your report is going to the CEO, your report must make an impact a like that of a billboard, for which you have 20 seconds or less to get your message across. If it is going to marketing, the report should be short, but detailed enough to include brand data as well as corporate data. If it is for market research, you'll need to provide cross tabs and other supporting data. If it's the VP of Communications, you'll want to make sure you go into a bit more detail as to why certain results are the way they are.

### **4. What other departments/areas will be affected? ...or... Who will be involved in implementing changes as a result of your measurement program?**

This is one of the most important questions, because if you do not have buy-in to change behavior or strategy, then your measurement program will be a waste of effort. Whoever might have to change as a result of your measurement needs to be involved in the process of designing the measurement program. Without buy-in, change will not happen.

### **5. What are your key messages?**

If you haven't articulated them yet, or don't know what they are, you should do research to figure out what messages will resonate most forcefully with your target audience.

### **6. Who are your program's target audience(s)?**

This is another question that may be pretty obvious for some companies, but it never hurts to get it in writing. The important thing to do is to define the audience as specifically as you can. No matter what you sell, the answer to this question is not, "anyone with a pulse." There is always, within any market, a set of customers who are the most profitable, the most valuable. These are the ones you want to target.

### **7. Who influences that audience?**

You need to look at what all the influences are on that audience; Web sites, online publications, politicians, NGOs, peers, educators, discussion groups, industry gurus, etc.

### **8. How do you distribute your product/service?**

Who are the secondary influences on your business? These are sometimes equally important to your efforts to affect change.

### **9. What measurement programs are currently underway?**

You may be able to tailor new measures to complement existing ones. For instance, could sales or lead tracking data be compared to PR activities and measures?

### **10. What's important?**

Once you've defined the profile, you can now go about determining what issues matter most to the audience. What inspires them, what scares them, what they are most passionate about? Where do they go for information? All of our research shows that the closer you get to a person's passions, the more likely they



are to be loyal to your company or brand. What's important about this exercise is not knowing the right answers, but achieving consensus among the people who will be using and/or contributing to the measurement data. Getting everyone on the same page is an absolute necessity before you can begin to implement a measurement program.

## **The Seven Basic Steps of any Measurement Program**

An ideal measurement program has seven basic steps; we'll talk about each of them in detail.

### **Step 1:**

#### **Identify the audiences and publics with whom you have relationships**

Every organization continuously communicates with numerous audiences, including the media, prospects, customers, partners, employees, governments, communities, investors, thought leaders and the international community. While you may think your advertising and public relations are reaching only your customers and your prospects, in reality it may also be seen by your other audiences too. And with the help of the Internet, most of the time you communicate to those same audiences around the world.

The best way to identify and agree on just who your own audiences are is to put all the communications people in your organization in a room and ask them. You may be surprised at the answer. When doing this I've sometimes ended up with two dozen distinct audiences. The idea is to get as many as possible down on paper and then to ask them to prioritize the list.

### **Step 2:**

#### **Define objectives for each audience**

You can't start to measure success until you know what success means for you. So, the next question you need to ask the group is: How does a good relationship with each audience benefit the organization and how might a bad relationship threaten it? Articulate what the specific benefits are of your efforts. The answers should relate back to strategic corporate goals, like increasing market share, owning a position in the marketplace, or, for non-profits, fulfilling a mission. To help people clarify their objectives, we surveyed corporate communications professionals to see what they thought was the most important objective for

their PR program. Eighty-five percent cited product or corporate awareness.

Other typical objectives included the following.

- Increase exposure for the company name or product
- Increase dissemination of company or product messages
- Educate certain publics
- Generate leads
- Move prospects along the purchase cycle
- Sell product

Once these larger goals are set, and at least one should be set for each audience, you can then prioritize your efforts according to which benefits are most important to your organization. Force rank each audience—no ties allowed.

Now, starting with the most important goals and audiences, set specific and measurable objectives. And be sure they include a time frame. For example: “Achieve 25% more awareness than the competition by the end of Q4.”

A typical problem occurs when groups have mixed objectives. For example, one of the most frequently mentioned goals we hear is, “to reach our target audiences with our key quality message.” This goal is great as long as the target audiences are similar. But what if one product group is targeting seniors and the next is targeting college students? Quality may mean different things to different audiences. The best solution here is to separate objectives for each specific population.

### **Step 3:**

#### **Define your measurement criteria**

Once you've agreed upon your objectives you must establish the specific criteria of success that you will measure. Each objective may require a different type of measurement. Some criteria are tied to output measures, like getting messages out to a particular audience. Others may be outcome measures, like raising awareness for your brand. And still others may be outcome measures, like getting people to attend your event, or download something from your Web site. If your objective is awareness, the criterion might be the percentage increase of unaided awareness. If your objective is to sell product, the criterion might be

the incremental sales after a particular PR or promotional program took place.

Years of advertising research indicates that visibility is directly linked to awareness. So if awareness is your objective, it is critical that your publicity programs break through the clutter and get your name out more prominently than the competition. This doesn't just mean more articles. It means more mentions of the company name in headlines, captions or other places of greater visibility.

The criterion for success in this case could be sheer volume of coverage compared to the competition. An even better measure would be percent of articles featuring the company name in the headline. This figure would then be compared to the percent of articles that mention the competition's name in the headlines. That data could then be compared to ongoing brand awareness tracking studies to compare the impact of your earned media with that of your paid media.

A common element of publicity programs is to establish company spokespeople as industry leaders or reliable sources on topics of interest. In this case a goal could be to boost your share of quotes to be equal to or greater than that of the competition by some particular point in time. Obviously if your spokesperson is getting quoted more often than the owner of a competitive franchise, then your program is more effective.

One thing I've learned by studying hundreds of communication programs is that quality has no single definition. Different aspects of communication are important to different people. We'll be discussing specific criteria appropriate for different audiences over the next few chapters. See Figure 1.3.

## **Step 4:**

### **Define your benchmark**

The key point to remember about any evaluation program is that measurement is a comparative tool; to decide if you are successful you compare your results to something else. The most effective comparisons are to your competition and peers over time, to just yourself over time, or to an industry average.

Ideally you would benchmark against two to three competitors: a stretch goal, a peer company and an underdog who's just beginning to nip at your heels. See Figure 1.4. Remember, even if you're in the nonprofit sector, you are still competing for share of wallet.

The next most effective benchmark is to compare your company to its past performance over time. If

possible, don't just arbitrarily pick a calendar year or quarter; choose your benchmark(s) so you can track the results of a significant event, like when a new CEO joined the company or when a new agency signed on. While this will tell you how your performance is improving or declining, it won't tell you anything about how you are doing relative to the market. If at all possible, track your competitors, too.

The least expensive benchmark is an industry survey. If you're a big enough company, these benchmark studies can be particularly useful. I conducted one study with over a hundred thousand articles analyzed over several years and found that, on average, 30 percent of all articles were positive, 6 percent were negative and 29 percent communicated key messages. However, the actual numbers vary considerably between business-to-business and consumer organizations.

## **Step 5: Select a measurement tool**

Your measurement tools are the techniques you will use to collect data. These are useless unless they collect the sort of data that will help you evaluate your progress toward your goals. Essentially, you will be collecting data in one of these three ways:

1. Primary research via telephone, mail or online survey
2. Secondary research of other data available
3. Primary research in the media, including Internet sources

We go into detail about measurement tools in Chapter 3.

Not only do your tools need to collect the right data, but you must make sure they are affordable, and that they provide the data when you need it. At one company I worked for, we did all of our planning in August, yet the yearly benchmark evaluation of our PR program occurred in January. Thus the data we worked with while planning was six months out of date. And the new data wouldn't be available until the following January, giving rise to the oft-repeated groan, "If we only had the analysis now." Note: "On time" for most companies means that you have a report in hand when it is of value, that is, as you start your planning.

## **Step 6:**

### **Analyze results, compare results to objectives, glean insight, draw actionable conclusions and make recommendations**

The most important element to any measurement program is to analyze the data and draw conclusions. Once you've collected all of your results, avoid the temptation to focus only on the most exciting. I've seen many reports gloat that, "Press coverage increased by 50 percent!" but fail to mention the fact that reach into the highest priority audience segment dropped by 15 percent or that the key messages about a particular product were never communicated.

To make information meaningful and actionable, relate each conclusion back to your original objectives. Compare the length of your message communication bar this quarter to its length last quarter. As a history major working in engineering companies, I quickly learned that the key to action was to communicate with my top management in language they could understand. The language of business is charts and graphs. Therefore, to put measurement to work for you, you must learn to translate your raw numbers into charts and graphs with short headlines that draw conclusions from the data. Once you've done so, you're one step closer to actionable information.

The other aspect of ensuring that your information is actionable is applying it to relevant programs that you can do something about. Do not measure dead products, competitors that aren't viable or publications you don't have time to target.

### **Leverage the Value of Your Measurement Efforts**

You will never be as powerful or persuasive as when you present your results to your bosses, so think ahead about what actions, including the following, you might want them to take. Plan your presentation accordingly.

#### **Ask for money**

Many clients I've worked with received additional budgetary dollars on the spot, just by showing their results.

### **Get commitment**

Have you ever had a hard time persuading an executive to go on a press tour? Show them the chart to indicate the potential disaster if they don't go.

### **Manage timing**

When you present results in the form of graphs and charts to show how effective strategic timing can be, it's amazing how many Martians you can convince to do it your way.

### **Buy influence**

Use your results to win other departments over to your point of view and approve your programs.

### **Get outside help**

Convince your bosses that you really need more help if they want to achieve their desired results. Coverage for one client we were working with skyrocketed in August and continued at vastly increased rates. I couldn't figure out what happened, until I presented results. Then I learned that the client had doubled its staff in July. Conversely, another client saw its share of ink disappear. When I asked what had been going on internally, I learned that the disappearing press coverage coincided with a reorganization that had included dissolving the PR department.

### **Just say no**

All too often we hear from overworked marketers with unclear priorities looking for ways to figure out where to put their limited resources. By using the data from results to demonstrate what doesn't work, you can frequently dissuade managers and colleagues from making the same mistake twice. Has a product manager ever asked you to do a party or a press conference because he/she thought it would be, "a fun way to introduce the product"? Show the manager a chart that illustrates how much more effectively a press tour communicates the key messages.

## **Step 7:**

### **Make changes and measure again**

At its core, measurement is a continuous improvement process. For any measurement system to work you need to assess results, make changes, see if those changes had an impact, make more changes etc.

The idea is that whenever you need to decide what tactic to use, what resources to pull in, or what spokesperson or message to emphasize, you would have up to date data at your fingertips. For that reason you need to set up a regular reporting schedule with your favorite Martians so that you can not only demonstrate results but also get buy in to changes in the program.

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