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Communication World Magazine

How to Make Measurement Count in 2018

5 December 2017 by Deb Camden — Leave a Comment

Every year, organizations across the world **spend more than US$14 billion dollars** on their public relations efforts, and that figure is set to grow to US$19.3 billion by 2020. Yet, how much of this activity is delivering value and if asked, can we provide proof?

Faced with tight economic conditions and potential budget cutbacks, communicators are under increasing pressure to demonstrate business results and are looking to harness new tools to assist them.

According to the USC Annenberg Strategic Communication and Public Relations Center's **Generally Accepted Practices Study (GAP VIII)** (2014), "there is a lack of faith in current tools and a need for new tools that do a better job of measuring actual outcomes and actions, rather than outputs." In the companies surveyed, the study found that:

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- 49 percent use measurement techniques developed in-house.
- 26 percent use techniques recommended by professional/industry groups.
- 20 percent use proprietary methods developed by their outside agencies.
- 22 percent are making increasing use of audience research in planning and evaluating campaigns.
- 31 percent are measuring online conversations.

Interestingly, as in all seven previous GAP studies, no single measurement tool earned a usage score significantly greater than five on a scale of 1 (no usage) to 7 (extensive usage), suggesting a lack of faith in currently available tools, and a need for new tools that do a better job of measuring actual outcomes and actions, rather than outputs.

The five most commonly used measurement tools used by practitioners were:

1. Influence on reputation (5.01)
2. Social or online media metrics (4.87)
3. Content analysis of clips (4.65)
4. Total number of clips (4.35)
5. Total impressions (4.3).

Evaluating tools

To help communicators choose the right measurement tools, the City of Westminster in the U.K. offers a handy **reference guide** titled "Evaluating Your Communication Tools: What Works, What Doesn't?".

The guide introduces The Westminster Model, which advocates that effective evaluation raises the profile of the communication function and brings boardroom credibility. It suggests that evaluation should be seen as a key part of the communication process, and not a bolt-on at the end, and thought needs to be put into understanding exactly what outcomes can and should be measured.

At a minimum, organizations should ensure they have ways for measuring:

- How they perform in the media.
- How informed their staff are.
- How campaigns are performing.

Choosing the right tools

Enter "communication measurement tools" into your favorite search engine and a host of software solutions will appear offering advice and services for measuring everything from internal communication to campaign ROI. But how do they measure up, and how do you know if they're worth the investment or the effort to switch from your current methods?

Each has their own pros and cons, so the best thing you can do is to make a careful assessment about what is the right solution for your organization.

Here are six tips to help when choosing your next communication measurement tool.

1. **Set out with a budget in mind**: With all the bells and whistles functionality now available, it's easy to blow your budget. Remember, there are a host of free software tools available including ones that can alert you to media mentions (**Google Alerts**), web analytics tools (**Google Analytics**) that track website traffic referred from other sites and social media listening (**Hootsuite**) to find influencers and trending topics. However, you'll need to invest if you want to go beyond the basics to look for deeper insights, monitor mentions, track key messages and identify influencers.
2. **Choose an integrated platform**: Forget switching between Google Analytics and dashboards for your organization's social media platforms. Technologies now exist that allow you to host all of your critical communication metrics in a single platform offering a view of performance across a variety of functions including media, digital media, publications, internal communication, government relations, sponsorship and events.
3. **Aim for a flexible solution**: While "set and forget" analytics solutions are tempting for their simplicity, they often fail to show the whole picture of your communication performance, as well as the important metrics that are unique to your organization. Choose tools that are flexible and allow you to build custom metrics for tracking your communication strategy and individual campaigns.
4. **Operate in real time**: Gone are the days of monthly board reports based on manual-entry spreadsheets. In our fast-paced, digitally disrupted world, the need for access to real-time data as the basis for dynamic insights has never been more important. APIs (application program interfaces) are making it easier than ever to connect technology solutions into the cloud.
5. **Make sure it's simple to use**: Ease of use is a key criterion especially where number-challenged communication practitioners are concerned. Data visualization programs and graphical interfaces are making dashboards easier than ever to design and maintain, and they're increasingly affordable too.
6. **Present with impact**: The old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words has never been truer than when it comes to preparing performance reports for senior management. Being able to quickly and easily translate data into information as the basis for decision-making is key to being able to successfully engage the C-suite.

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Deb Camden is a career communicator based in Australia and the founder of a boutique strategic communication consultancy, **PRISM Communication Architects**. Most recently, she has turned innovator, combining her business savvy with academic smarts to create a breakthrough measurement framework, **The Communication Dividend®**. Deb's latest innovation is a **SMART Objective Builder**, a new free web app that produces measurable objectives for communication strategies, plans and campaigns. You can connect with her on **LinkedIn** and Twitter: **@DebCamden**.