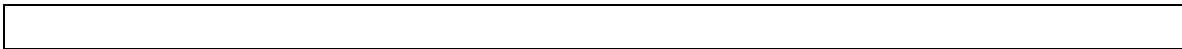




White Paper

Solving The Analytics Conundrum In Public Relations



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The good news is there are many ways to measure—but it still comes down to the philosophy of the one doing it

The beauty of numbers is they allow for insight. The horror of numbers is they allow you to be misled. It's important to tell the difference between an indicator of a true uptrend and what is nothing more than an outlier, that one rare occurrence which was little more than dumb luck. In addition, not all spikes in interest are worth it. The publicity that led to the surge may be for the wrong audience or for one that might turn off the very people you're looking to attract to your business. Here we give you a way to decipher analytics for a simpler take and one that will allow for measurement of long-term strategy, not those who choose to look at exceptions which tell you little.

The Internet, Thy Keeper Of Numbers

Ah, the life of a poll taker. Maybe in an empty cold room with a Formica desk and two chairs. Maybe on the street where your poll may actually tell you more about who has time to take polls than accuracy. Then, came the Internet. This living, seemingly breathing data collector has changed the way to measure analytics forever. While polls snatched that one moment in time—provided you understood the real impact of standard deviation and percent error—now web sites, social media such as Twitter and many other aspects allow for continual measure of how well something is doing (this isn't to say you lose polls, which can possibly allow for greater depth of questioning when human to human, but it's a gamechanger, nonetheless).

But for those who like to quickly boast their number of followers, they miss the boat. It's not just about showing up for the party but for those who wish to have you take their coat and stay for a while. You need to focus on actively measuring and valuing how long someone is viewing and/or engaging in your PR campaign, or even whether the responses came through Twitter or page views on your site. Step one is bringing the people, step two is having them want to continually come back to what you offer (Step three? Have them bring back others!).

But you also need to look at the quality of your audience. Sign-ups for special bonus aspects will allow you to gauge the age demographic you're attracting as you ask their age in one of the fields and their income. But also look at what was driving them. If your sponsors tend to be conservative and you drove the audience with, say, a fraternity party theme, then you've completely missed the point and diluted the audience. Though you want your numbers to grow, you may need to think about how to also keep an authenticity to your audience. Commenters on a blog don't love having members who take them off subject—they like to feel connected with their community, regardless of whether they agree with the topic or not. We're not saying to make your attitude dismissive, but it shouldn't be an automatic come one, come all.

What Did They Do?

No matter what, public relations will have an effect on everyone exposed to it. It will cause them to do something. They never buy your product or otherwise engage? Well, they did do something: they chose to do nothing. Let's face it: many PR teams don't do this and that's because they really don't want the answers. Many are satisfied to simply measure page views and be done with it—well, there are all sorts of ways to drive that, many of which don't lead to more business or even brand loyalty.

You also need to focus on the measure of synergy. Can you create PR products that feed into each other successfully? You produce a magazine that has a special offer for joining your web site—the web site with the offer for getting your app. If you can measure whether you can regularly successfully complete that triple play or beyond then you know your campaigns have true power. When you can literally extend your brand loyalty to endless platforms, you know you're making a dent. But, of course, a sensible connection is best, not a transparent ploy that anyone can see and, therefore, many would be annoyed by. Figure out which offerings work best in each medium and what is the intriguing connection that would lead you to jump from one to the other.

And if you're truly not scared for the world to know about your engagement, a blog can be a helpful analytic measure, provided you ask the right questions. If you post regularly, are you getting 1 comment, 11 or 111? How long are the comments? For the name's revealed, how many, when you look them up, seem to relate to your field? Are they truly qualified prospects? Enough blog entries and you have a clearer idea of where you stand.

In addition, you should attempt a conversion chart of sorts—don't believe everyone who says branding and sales numbers should be viewed so differently. Do you find for every 100 Facebook friend requests you have X amount of sales? Do you find the same thing for every 10 more commenters on your blog? Although social media has led to confusion in sales, to not analyze for any kind of approximation to your bottom line is too easy. We know companies pay a great deal for lists and can put a cost on that, so be more open to doing the same with social media. We know it's still scary for some of you, but social media is just not going away. And, hopefully, neither are you, right?

Don't Forget Your Change

A problem with analytics can be that it has the ability to be thrown off by change. Can you fairly measure one three-month period against another when the latter had a site redesign and a new SEO-driver philosophy? Answer: not always easily. At the same time, it's a chance to see what your little tweaks can at least do. What about when you just changed the landing page? You came up with a new web address and what effect did that have? Isolating the variable, a concept we've had drilled into our heads since Algebra, is simple yet so often overlooked. We get caught up in the one area we think is the difference maker, only to be completely oblivious to the actual catalyst. The Cracker Jack is tasty, but just don't forget to measure the effect of that lil' decoder ring at the bottom!

Who Do You Go To?

In many ways, there's no reason why you can't go about analytics on your own—as you can see, many times it's true that it's not the program but the analytical mind of the person who wants the data which makes the difference. Still, a company like Vocus that might make it easier for some. Part analytical software offering, part journalist connector, highlights include coverage reports and tracking the news you're sending out in terms of overall reach and quality of those reached. Here's the take of the Humane Society of the United States: “In just one year, we tripled media coverage, reduced the amount of negative news, and increased the amount of impressions with the correct use of the organization's name and key messaging by 535 percent.” Or you may go with a smaller organization, such as Cognito Analytics, which looks into areas like what your competitors say about themselves, let alone what is said about you. Or take Cymphony, which, according to them, will “measure the effectiveness of your online video campaigns by tracking and analyzing viral activity, social media conversation, and viewer demography and behavior before and after a video launch.”

But remember that you don't have to just stick to what these companies like these offer up front. Many should have the ability to customize in numerous ways to your needs. If they don't, there's probably someone else that will. But give them and others a chance to pitch you on why their measures work and what factors they ignore—the latter can even be more interesting since there are so many statistics that are useless noise at best and giving you a false sense of where you stand at worst.

Understand What You Both Consider Analytics

One great problem in analytics is aligned with another one that often comes with public relations. What the PR team considers strong feedback and what the client executives do. It would be best to have a talk beforehand about this, rather than a PR team excitedly showing you the success you've had together, only for you to let them know you don't consider it success at all. Not everyone values social media the same. Not everyone a TV spot. Come together to agree on priority and then you can work together to hit that target. Of course, that's not to say you can't look at what you thought was the original definition of success and find it isn't the right way to measure.

There's Lies, Lies and....

Hopefully you now see a few new ways to look at analytics and understand it's a strong way to inform but never a black and white tool. Let's remember we're dealing in statistics, a subject which is very easy to manipulate. Even allowing us to fool ourselves sometimes.

Work together to get an honest view of what these statistics mean and, again, try to some extent to limit the amount you look at. With 100 measures, surely you'll always find one

to cling to that says everything is okay. But wouldn't you rather find the ones that say the truth, even if it's a painful one?

And, beyond that, don't rule out a feeling. You may not be seeing the profit right away but you're hearing a buzz—and we all know what that can turn into. Analytics puts you at the advantage of having more information to go on, but it still likely started with a vision rather than a math problem. Let the numbers improve your efficiency, your sales strategy but not necessarily an overhaul of your product. Remember: As important a gift as numbers is the ability to look past them.