



How to Prove the Value of Communication

As we enter the third year of a global pandemic that has, thus far, shown no real signs of ending, communication and public relations professionals around the world continue to place even greater scrutiny on an age-old challenge:

How do we prove a return on investment in PR and communication initiatives?

It's a question that isn't new, but one that is being asked louder than ever as many companies manage the financial crunch that's been caused by the pandemic. In this e-book we will explore the challenges—and, indeed, the opportunities—of measuring and evaluating communication effectiveness.

The tools and tactics contained within can help professionals to not only analyze the effectiveness of their company's communication efforts, but to move from merely monitoring their media coverage to the more impactful act of surfacing high-value business intelligence and meaningful insights. We will share how to establish a link between the performance of an organization or brand's PR function and its strategic business objectives. And we will identify a combination of sound media measurement and evaluation with the use of creative analytics and reporting to make the most persuasive case to corporate executives.

“ Parallel to COVID's effect on so many areas of our lives, measurement and evaluation have also needed to re-examine communication through the lens of, 'Why are we doing this?' If we weren't doing it before, it is now essential to consider the impact of communication on our audience and society at large and re-evaluate our communication goals to ladder back to that impact.

— **Alex Christian**

Vice President,
Research + Analytics,
*EvolveMKD, a New York-based
PR and digital marketing agency*

Our goal: Equip communication professionals like you with the resources you need to prove the value of communication to your organization's bottom line.

SMARTER, Faster, Stronger

From the earliest days, communication professionals have struggled to find an effective way to measure the business value of what they do. At the heart of the conversation is a strong conviction that measuring public relations ROI with narrow metrics—such as the notorious ad value equivalency (AVE)—creates “serious practical and ethical flaws,” says Jim Macnamara, Ph.D., distinguished professor of public communication in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney.¹

Linking PR initiatives to specific business objectives is central to the “Barcelona Principles,” which were first introduced by the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications (AMEC) in 2010 and were refreshed in 2015 and again in 2020. Considered the gold standard of measurement practices, the Principles underscore the various ways in which PR initiatives drive overall organizational performance.

“The 3.0 refresh of the Barcelona Principles reflect a broader standard of measurement, focused heavily on measuring what matters to drive continuous improvement within an organization, rather than solely proving the value of communication,” says Johna Burke, global managing director and chief executive officer of AMEC. “[In the most recent refresh] the steering team added ‘what to do’ so communication professionals have clear guidance in putting the Principles into action.”

The guidelines encourage communication professionals to consider the following:

- Setting goals is an absolute prerequisite to communication planning, measurement and evaluation.
- Measurement and evaluation should identify outputs, outcomes and potential impact.
- Outcomes and impact should be identified for stakeholders, society and the organization.
- Communication measurement and evaluation should include both qualitative and quantitative analysis.
- AVEs are not the value of communication.
- Holistic communication measurement and evaluation includes all relevant online and offline channels.
- Communication measurement and evaluation are rooted in integrity and transparency to drive learning and insights.

¹Macnamara, Jim. (2006). Advertising Values to Measure PR: Why They Are Invalid.



Image use courtesy of Lewis.*

In addition to the Barcelona Principles, AMEC has established the Integrated Evaluation Framework, a model that moves toward evaluating the effect the work has on an organization's business objectives. Designed to work for organizations and brands of all sizes, the framework "operationalizes" the Barcelona Principles 3.0 by challenging PR pros to address:



OBJECTIVES:

align organizational and communication objectives



STRATEGY:

set target audiences, define key messages and develop a plan



IMPLEMENTATION:

tactical activity



MEASUREMENT:

measure activity based on predefined metrics and audience response



IMPACT:

provide insights into the effect of PR activity on organization's stakeholders



Start **SMARTER**

Every good measurement and analysis program begins and ends with a strong strategy. Only once you've developed your strategic communication roadmap can you begin implementing your program.

"If you don't know what to measure, how can you accurately determine how to measure?"

Consider establishing AMEC's **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**greed Upon, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-Based, **E**thical and **R**evolutionary (**SMARTER**) objectives at the start of every PR campaign.

"SMARTER objectives provide parameters that allow you to measure whether your communication activities are tracking toward success."

During AMEC's 2021 planning initiative, they suggested that to be even SMARTER, two additional criteria should be added:

Evaluated: suggesting that each objective should be assessed over time. "E" also represents "ethical" objectives aligned with your personal or organizational values, as well as valid methods of data gathering and analysis.

Reviewed: This requires reflecting and adjusting your approach or behavior to reach your objective. "R" also can be adapted to mean "recorded", "rewarded" or "recognized."

What does a **SMARTER** objective look like? Here are a few examples:

“ We will secure at least **25%** media share-of-voice among our competitors **in 2022**. ”

“ To improve customer retention, we will increase engagement levels on our social media posts by **10% within six months**. ”

“ **In the fourth quarter**, we will improve our key message penetration among target media by **5%**. ”

When tracking progress toward any communication objective, it's critical to accurately monitor for organization or brand mentions across all media types. That's where technology comes in, enabling us to automate the previously tedious process of collecting, mining, measuring and analyzing an organization's traditional, digital and social media presence.



For example, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) applications, such as sentiment analysis and entity linking, have made a significant impact on how PR pros can more precisely monitor their organization's visibility in traditional media outlets. There are tools to monitor and benchmark performance rankings for specified keywords, the number of backlinks to a designated web page, and, of course, website traffic. Social media measurement tools have improved the ability of professionals to measure how "likes" and "shares" translate into online visitors and convert to sales.

The convergence of paid, earned, shared and owned metrics underscore that in the 21st century knowledge economy, value is not found in what PR professionals can do but rather in what we know or can come to learn. As a result, communication measurement and evaluation has evolved, from simply providing media monitoring (what we can do), to delivering the actionable insights and keen business observations of media intelligence (what we know or can come to learn).

The Three Pillars of Media Intelligence

Media intelligence has three components, each of which has an important—and necessary—role to play: monitoring & metrics, measurement & analysis, and evaluation & insights.

Monitoring & Metrics

Media intelligence begins with capturing news content that's about, or somehow related to, your brand and competitors. This is the raw material that media intelligence couldn't exist without. This building block must be comprehensive and reliable or the additional steps in the process will always be compromised.

"You cannot manage what you cannot measure—and you cannot measure something that escapes your monitoring platform in the first place," says Burke. "This is why it is essential to deploy a comprehensive media intelligence solution that you can rely upon to monitor coverage across all media types and channels."

An advanced media monitoring and metrics solution puts the power in the hands of PR professional to:



Proactively monitor emerging industry issues and trends



Share copyright-compliant news and information



Benchmark their brands against competitors



Integrate compelling data analysis, including interactive charts and visualizations



Measure campaign successes



Identify new media partners and potential influencers

Measurement & Analysis

Measurement & analysis leverages the data that matters most to your brand or organization. This is what allows communication professionals to better understand the meaning behind the data, such as dissecting their brand reputations, identifying trends and benchmarking against competitors.

For earned media, this typically starts with measuring and analyzing coverage within traditional media categories—such as newspapers, magazines and broadcast outlets—in both their conventional and online formats. Common metrics include sentiment, coverage over time and share of voice.

For social media, measurement and analysis usually revolves around social listening, that is, monitoring billions of social posts in common social media channels across websites in hundreds of different languages. Here, engagement metrics are often key.



Remember: if it matters then it must be measured.



3 Tips for Selecting a Media Intelligence Solution

There are three key elements that any media intelligence solution should provide to an organization or brand committed to converting media monitoring to media intelligence.

1

SCOPE

An advanced media monitoring solution, such as Nexis Newsdesk™, should search a global content collection from a single dashboard and enable communication professionals to monitor their organizations, brands and competitors around the world, across all media types, languages and channels.

2

DISTRIBUTION

Leading media monitoring and metrics platforms make it easy for users to share relevant business intelligence across their organizations and to relevant stakeholders, offering customizable distribution tools such as alerts, branded newsletters, live dashboards, embeddable visualizations and RSS feeds.

3

METRICS

It is important to understand “the big picture” by combining key metrics with visualization tools that turn data into easy-to-digest charts and graphs. These might include share of voice, sentiment analysis, coverage by geography or other important measures.



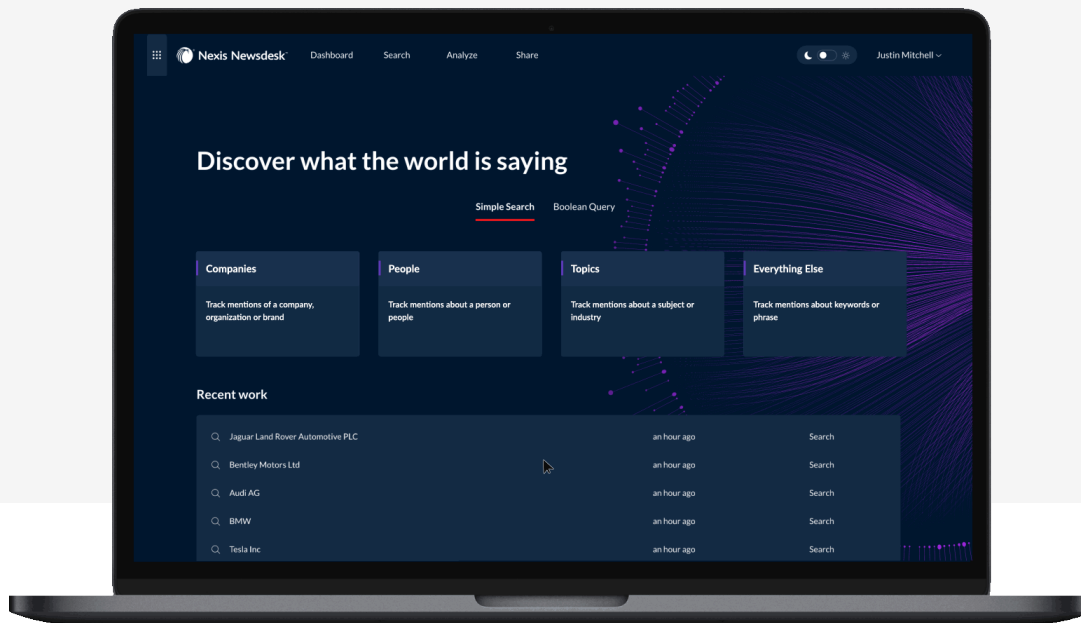
Evaluation & Insights

The final step to effective media intelligence is to convert the data and learnings from monitoring & metrics and measurement & analysis into high-level yet actionable evaluation & insights. Most often, this means making the most persuasive case to the C-Suite possible through a combination of sound media measurement and evaluation, the right business language, and creative analytics and reporting.

For example, a gap analysis can establish, then measure, specific benchmarks a communication team wants address through their communication strategy and tactical initiatives. In-depth evaluations of leading coverage drivers, key messaging, nuanced coverage sentiment and other business insights also provide valuable context that tie business outcomes to PR efforts.

These are tangible ways to link paid, earned, shared and owned media performance to an organization or brand's priority business objectives and bottom line. (Not to mention a powerful way to demonstrate the value and ROI of public relations efforts.)

High-level media analysis requires more patience and persistence than automated monitoring, but the business intelligence and ROI insights are well worth the extra effort. And while machine learning and AI-driven tools make it simpler and more efficient to monitor, mine, visualize and report earned media, the fact remains: there are aspects of media intelligence that are not as effectively or holistically delivered by technology as they are by humans.



Powerful Tools for Powerful Results

LexisNexis® is leading the way with products and services that assist PR professionals in their efforts to measure results more accurately and evaluate ROI more credibly than in the past. Nexis® Media Intelligence Solutions helps PR practitioners cut through the noise to uncover the information that really matters to assess the value of a strategic communication program.

Tools such as Nexis Newsdesk™ and Nexis® Social Analytics—complemented by professional services from the Nexis® Media Intelligence Research and Analytics group—allow communicators to learn what is being said about their brands, benchmark against key peers, and gain powerful insights that can shape the direction of future activities. This level of business intelligence helps PR teams connect the results of their services to business outcomes and therefore better measure the value of PR to the business.

To learn more about Nexis Media Intelligence, visit:

LexisNexis.com/MediaIntelligence

* Lewis gets great benefit by putting each of its clients squarely at the heart of the Integrated Evaluation Framework. We urge you to do the same.

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