

Communication Handbook - Factsheet 4

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Monitoring and Evaluation

- ⇒ The need for monitoring your communication
- ⇒ How to plan and resource your evaluation
- ⇒ The main evaluation tools



Why to evaluate communication activities?

It is important to evaluate the success of PR activities, in order to learn which activities worked well and which should be improved in future. Evaluation also creates useful feedback to share with others in the project, so that they can learn from your experience. State in your communications plan the criteria by which you will measure its success.

It is always important to measure the success if any public relations activities that are undertaken. Evaluation helps to determine whether communications are working. Are you reaching out to the right target audiences? Do they understand clearly what your project is trying to do? If not, you need to find out why at an early stage in order to modify your campaign.

⇒ **Are you reaching out to the right target audiences? Do they understand clearly what your project is trying to do?**

Evaluation can also be a crucial tool to communicate and justify the benefits of PR within your organisation, particularly if faced with scepticism or misunderstanding among managers or on the board. If you can prove that PR activities have changed people's behaviours or attitudes, sold more products or made your target audiences aware of a certain issue, you are more likely to win their support and endorsement.

Evaluation can help you to measure the success of your communications team and external agencies and address any team issues quickly. Evaluation can help you to benchmark your project against other projects to make sure that you are getting the exposure you deserve.

It also enables you to learn best practice from other projects, share ideas and perhaps work on joint communications activities with projects that address similar themes across the programme or with other transnational projects.

In house or external?

There are many methods of evaluating the success of public relations and communications activities. Some are very easy to do in-house, while others are more expensive and complex and might require the help of a specialist external organisation.

This factsheet focuses on four key areas of evaluation: media monitoring, media analysis, online analysis and measuring behaviour change. This is not an exhaustive list of measurement tools: beyond these core disciplines it will be important for your project to find methods that are the right fit for your communications goals and objectives. You will have to decide how much staff and financial resource you can allocate to this.

⇒ You should allocate some resource and use to as an opportunity to compare practices with other projects

Evaluation tools

Media monitoring

Regularly following press coverage about your organisation, your industry and your competitors is one of the most important tasks in public relations. This information should be fed back to management on a daily or weekly basis, depending on the nature and communications environment of your organisation. Strong strategy and effective decision making depends on understanding current issues and what your stakeholders are saying and hearing about you.

Many organisations appoint individuals responsible for monitoring the media and providing feedback. This may take the form of scanned press articles that are emailed to key people on a regular basis. If the amount of coverage is so large that it would be unrealistic to expect everyone to read all of it, a synopsis or summary report drawing attention to the most important articles may be more efficient. Always circulate press coverage to colleagues in the PR and marketing teams, to make sure that everyone is up-to-date with current information.

The process of media monitoring and reporting is a useful task in itself for the PR department because it helps staff to understand the media environment and gain hands-on knowledge of what makes news in your target media. This is a useful way to stimulate ideas for new and creative future news angles, as well as keeping an eye on the news angles in which other organisations like yours are featuring.

Media analysis

A more in-depth look at press coverage will enable you to look at longer-term developments in opinion about your organisation, industry and your competitors. It is also a good way to give senior executives within your organisation a regular update on your work and the media results that it generates. A media analysis should be a detailed look at the press coverage you have received, in an accessible format incorporating charts or graphs that make the information easy to assimilate and understand.

Typical areas for attention will include:

- Volume (number of articles) of press coverage about your organisation
- Tone of press coverage: is coverage positive, negative or neutral?
- Prominence of press coverage: small mention in an article, small article specifically about your organisation, large article, etc.
- Presence of desired messages in press coverage (see message analysis below)

If you have a small budget it is fine to do a media analysis yourself, but it can be time consuming and is unlikely to be as objective as it would be if done by an external organisation.

Message analysis

Messages are so crucial that it is worthwhile making an effort to determine the extent to which they are actually being conveyed to target audiences. Depending on the budget available, this process can range from simply evaluating whether messages appear in media coverage right up to conducting detailed and direct surveys of your target audiences to establish whether they know your messages. Such surveys can take place by telephone, email, online or letter.

Benchmarking behaviour change

If one of your goals is to change people's perceptions, attitudes or opinions it will be useful to determine whether your communications activities have actually succeeded in changing behaviour. The typical approach that most organisations use to achieve this is through a benchmarking survey.

In this process target audiences are surveyed at the outset of a communications programme, again halfway through the campaign, and again finally at the end. The results will enable an organisation to track the impact of its activities systematically and if necessary make ongoing adjustments.

Benchmarking surveys should usually be managed by a specialist company. If that is not possible within your budget, you may consider running an informal online or telephone survey to canvass opinions. This will not yield rigorous data to underpin evidence-based decision making, but anecdotal information can give you a useful steer.

Web evaluation

As the communications focus for many types of audiences migrates steadily online, so web evaluation tools are becoming increasingly important. Consult with IT experts before establishing online systems to ensure that their structure will provide you with useful information about users. Basic web evaluation might involve measuring site visits alongside the timing of public relations activities to establish whether surges and peaks in traffic to your website correspond with interest that you have generated. In addition you may want to use more sophisticated software to provide more granular detail, such as the length of time visitors spend on a site, their geographical origin, the pages on which they arrive, the path they take through your site, which pages they spend most time on, and perhaps most importantly, how they were referred to your site. Consider incorporating interactive features such as surveys.

Advertising value equivalency (AVE)

AVE was developed as an attempt to compare the value of editorial media coverage with paid advertising. In theory it should enable an organisation to express the value of media exposure in terms of the price they would have had to pay for advertising that would generate an equivalent degree of publicity or exposure. AVE is still in common use in some markets, but it is no longer endorsed by many PR associations who view the concept of putting a financial value on press coverage as inherently unreliable. AVE should generally be treated with caution and is usually less useful than specific and targeted evaluation methods.

In the end it is up to you to decide how much resource you can delegate to this – but we advise that you do include some evaluation and monitoring activities in your communications plan.



The main evaluation tools are:

Media monitoring

Message analysis

Benchmarking behaviour change

Web analysis

Advertising value equivalency