

## NEELIMA KHANNA'S VIEWS ON EVALUATING PR PERFORMANCE

PR measurement and evaluation is fundamental to the role of practitioners that needs immediate attention. Lack of good evaluation methodologies is a key contributor to the image handicap faced by communication professionals.

There has been a lot of debate on where the PR function fits into an organisation – is it marketing, or is it more in line with the corporate management of the company. I believe that we are closer to the corporate management function of an organisation, but unlike other corporate management practices that have adopted tools to evaluate performance, communication professionals have shied away from adopting measurement practices. This function is therefore not seen as the driver of corporate management functions. An integrated research programme to complement a PR programme could possibly earn PR a position in the boardrooms.

*Transition of PR...*

‘PR practitioners Gruing, Vibbers and others point to public relations evolving from a communication technician role focussed on producing and distributing information, to a communications manager role focussed on building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders. ’

If a communication practitioner wants to truly transit from the role of being a technician (order taker, running errands, etc.) to being a key manager that defines relationships with internal or external audiences, evaluation and measurement will enable the change.

*Inadequate systems plague PR...*

Introspection on the factors have kept us away from adopting good measurement practices reveal general satisfaction with the current, archaic system of ‘advertising equivalent models’. There has been a failure to recognise the distinctive difference between PR and advertising. Hence comparing PR measurement with advertising equivalent space is like comparing apples with oranges. Internationally this is methodology is already redundant.

Another common measurement yardstick is by the sound of the ‘thud on the CEO’s table’. The larger the noise of the ‘thud’ (fatter clipping dossier), the better the job! This again prevents the practitioner from realising the true power of their work. The volumes cannot encapsulate the key messaging and resultant change in the perceptions of the organisation among key audiences. Therefore, going the by the volume game is detrimental to ones own effort and initiative. Also, is only indicates the extent of coverage (i.e., being in trade press, regionals, mainline & business press, etc.) rather than provide an understanding of the significance

of this coverage.

Most often, after the completion of a programme, there is little understanding if preferences have shifted, has there been any change in awareness, is the company being viewed more favourably, etc. The real impact of the programme and its effect on the target audience is not recognised.

*Myths about measurement...*

Introspecting further, one common myth that prevents practitioners from adopting scientific measurement techniques includes the fear that such a technique will reveal that the tediously planned programme isn't working. However, by not accepting facts, more harm is being done. Another common myth about measurement is that it is all about numbers. Here one must recognise that in any kind of measurement model qualitative trends can emerge only when there is quantitative understanding. Therefore the need to look at numbers and but more importantly understand what these numbers mean. This is where partners like Carma International or ORG MARG step in by bringing key technologies that enable a look at the complete picture.

Many others believe that it is expensive and only for big budget companies. You will all agree that the pressure to perform and deliver is the same for a large or small player in any industry, and hence the need for adopting measurement techniques regardless of company's size. Another myth is to say, "I know it's working because I see the clips coming in." It's like a forest officer who knows and recognises each and every tree in his forest but can never see the entire forest. So you may know that there are 100 trees in the forest, but will never know how those 100 trees look like when seen collectively. You also don't really know how is your forest vis-à-vis your competitor forests.

*Evaluation aids focussing the PR programme*

...

Reputation management is the primary task that each practitioner is trusted with. "You are largely responsible for the image of the company", is a commonly heard statement. How you shape it, how you define it, and how you manage it -- remains a large part of the responsibility of PR practitioners. You are possibly 'managing reputation' without getting any formal feedback or without the use of any scientific methods of knowing whether the programme requires any change in direction or focus. Measurement and evaluation helps you manage you programme more effectively.

Similarly, event sponsorships or use of brand ambassadors is gaining popularity, as it is vastly believed to 'enhance awareness/reputation'. But do companies know for sure that it has worked for their company? The 'gut feel' yes or no must be replaced by proper evaluation techniques, also so

that the budgets for the next programme can be enhanced!

*Replace 'gut feel', yes or no by proper evaluation techniques*

When we say communication, most organisations are looking at any or all of the following functions: advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, publicity, brochures/booklets, video & audio-visual, annual reports, newsletters/bulletins, government relations, internal communication, events, community relations, sponsorships, multimedia, on-line services, customer services and telephone reception. This makes the task of the communication practitioner not only multi-dimensional but also makes evaluation mission critical.

The Macro Model of Evaluation that CARMA presents seeks to integrate all tasks that a communication practitioner is required to perform. Typically, there are three stages to any PR activity:

*Macro Model of Evaluation...*

Inputs  
Outputs  
Outcomes

Input stage is the conceptualising of any programme or initiative. For example, story ideas and copy matter for a newsletter, information for news release, design and contents for web site, etc. Output is the final product that needs to be created, for example, newsletter printed, publicity gained, event held or web site posted. Outcome is what needs to be achieved through those products – has there been any change in behaviour or attitude, or has there been any change in awareness levels? Evaluation (formal or informal) at all these three stages is bound to increase efficiency and productivity.

# MACRO MODEL OF EVALUATION

An approach for continuous evaluation utilising a range of formal and informal methods

## Sample Methodologies:

- (1) Behaviour changed
- (2) Attitude changed
- (3) Awareness increased

Quantitative research  
Qualitative research

Reader & audience surveys  
Media Content analysis  
Awards Media monitoring  
Inquiry or response rates  
Readership/audience statistics  
Circulation/distribution statistics

Pre-testing with focus groups  
Readability studies (eg Flesch)  
Case studies  
Informal focus groups  
Feedback  
Secondary data (existing research)

### OUTCOMES

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

### EXAMPLES

Newsletter printed  
Publicity gained  
Event held  
Web site posted

### OUTPUTS

### INPUTS

### EXAMPLES

Story list & copy for newsletter  
Information for news release  
Speaker list & program  
Design & contents for Web site

For example, a newsletter can be pre-tested with a small focus group whose feedback can prove to be valuable, or one can also look at case studies to learn for others experience. However, most of us miss this first step of evaluation at the input stage, probably due to time constraints. At the output stage also, there is contentment if the press release has been delivered to 20 media (and resultant coverage), newsletter has been distributed to 500 people – the job is done. Herein lies the catch. All of us believe that the outputs are the outcomes. The process of evaluation is stopped at that point and we fail to recognise that outcomes are independent of outputs. There are several methodologies to evaluate each stage of PR activity that can be customised to each PR activity.

*Media Content analysis...*

Of the whole portfolio of methodologies that Carma has, the most relevant is the media content analysis. This is because media is the most often used PR tool and is also the most dominant and influential in the way people believe, think, buy and vote. All of us have been using the media effectively in sending messages to public stakeholders, our competitors, and in general, to strive for a leadership position in the industry. Increasingly the realisation has set that the media is not only taking our messages, they are going back to each of the 'impact zones' asking them what they view impartially, and from there creating their own story lines. Therefore if there is a methodology whereby the media can be used as a means to assimilate information and decipher intelligence, it can work brilliantly. Not only can it help companies hone their relationships with the media, but can also provide useful insights and intelligence on public stakeholders and the 'voice' you enjoy in the industry.

How the process works: The content in the media about the organisation and the competitor is the base for this research. This is evaluated against several parameters - media name/city/state, type of publication, type of coverage, favourability, byline, fairness, issues, messages and sources. Thereafter each and every element that defines a media story is given a valuation in the CARMA Favourability Rating System. This system would rate placement, messages, headline, photo, tone, sources and size and give favourability rating in terms of percentages. Therefore, we move away from just looking at the trees to looking at the forest.

*Other CARMA outputs...*

The overall favourability analysis measures how any initiative such as new product launch, a new service, new management practice, new employees, etc. impact in creating favourability levels for the company. Other techniques include evaluating share of voice, tracking the impact of key issues on the business, how often the media is talking about your pre-determined messaging, etc. Evaluation of these parameters

will help in reworking and repositioning if required. Evaluation can also be done with regard to geographical spread – how is the programme working in A city/ country/ market as compared to B city /country/ market.

To sum up and to re-iterate, measurement gives you the power to be accountable, it gives you the power to understand the media in totality (as opposed to few individuals) and finally, it makes your function a key contributor to management decision making.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*One aspect of evaluation is seeing whether the needle has moved – whether there is any change in the outcome. Is there a model that tracks change in perception primarily due to efforts in media or any activity related to PR?*

Neelima Khanna stated that what evaluation really brings to the organisation is confirmation of what factor actually moved that needle. Was it factor A, B or C. Therefore to some extent the organisation has some kind of understanding of what really drives the communication favourably, unfavourably, or not at all. Currently, companies look at three issues – Market Share Increase, Sales Increase, Share Price Drop Increase and these are the three ways by which Carma evaluates all of the collective good work that the organisation is doing.

*Should advertising, PR and marketing agencies come together to discuss and analyse the key messages emanated from the company? Who should be doing research for the client? Should it be the company, the agency or a third party?*

Neelima Khanna replied that it should be a partnership, which can be driven by the client or the agency. If the agency feels the pressure to show its deliverables, then it is agency-driven. On the other hand, if it is the company that needs to know how their processes are working, then it is client-driven.

Neelima Khanna said that the company could best answer as to who it thought could be most objective in such a situation and who was better equipped to bring in the maximum results. Research of this type is scientific, systematic and comprehensive and not a couple of slides put together overnight and presented to the CEO.

*Comment by Ranjana Smetacek of Monsanto..*

PR does not equal media relations and Monsanto is reluctant to measure their PR agency's endeavour by the 'thud factor', which is the decibel of sound that is heard when the clippings folder is dropped on the table! Monsanto, across

world regions, makes graphs of positive, negative or neutral, based on individual country judgement and then links this up in terms of time frame with initiatives that have been undertaken. For instance, if a new initiative in communication with the press has resulted in a high or in a dip, the company knows that the initiative is either working or not. These findings are then shared with other regions and if something is working in India, there is a good chance that it might work in Indonesia or the other way round.

*(Excerpted from the presentation made by Neelima Khanna, CEO Carma International, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in New Delhi on November 2, 2000)*