

SANKARA PILLAI'S VIEWS ON EVALUATING PR PERFORMANCE

PR evaluation and effort...

PR evaluation is any *research* aimed at determining relative effectiveness of a PR programme, strategy or activity. In the measurement of outputs and outcomes, like in any proper, planned exercise, predetermining of objectives is absolutely essential. In any PR effort aimed at moving the level of people's awareness, knowledge, attitude, preferences and behaviour if possible the key questions are:

Has the needle moved?

How much has it moved? and,

Has it moved in the right direction?

Methods for measurement ...

Measuring PR outputs is measuring the short-term effects of any PR activity as opposed to measuring outcomes that are long term in nature and measure any attitude or behaviour change.

Methods for measurement of PR outputs can be:

Media content analysis

Survey research

Cyberspace research

Trade and event measurement

Media content analysis is some measure of media exposure. The number of variables for coding/analysis is critical. Usually the kinds of variables used are: *vehicle* – which publication did it appear; *placement* – where did the story appear, which page; *reach* – circulation and readership; *topic* – the context in which the message was placed; and *judgement* – was it fair, beneficial.

Survey research is more suited to find if the key target groups have been exposed to key messages and to assess the short-term impact of a PR effort.

Importance of analysing cyber space....

As the Internet becomes more and more pervasive, the need to analyse cyber space is becoming increasingly important. The criteria used are the same as used in print. Additional variables such as click throughs, home page visits, bytes transferred, traffic times and feedback forms are also used. ORG-MARG has two products to measure these. 1) The 'cyber enumerator' where we install a software at sites that measures how many people have visited the site, how much time has been spent, etc. 2) The 'cyber evaluator' that is also a software that is installed in the machine that check what sites have been visited and then links their profile with the sites they visited.

Variables for trade shows and events measurement include

total number of people who attended, what is the profile of people who attended, promotional material that was distributed and content analysis of editorial space generated. Measures for evaluating PR outcomes include awareness and comprehension studies, recall and retention studies, attitude and preference measures and behaviour measures.

The ORG-MARG technique...

When we evaluate media content we undertake an analysis of the message. In other words we do not rely on the quantum of coverage, but break down the message into simple elements, view the messages in context and then provide advise on how to build communication based on this. We have collaboration with a UK based company called Media Measurement who have a proprietary software that we are licensed to use that goes beyond evaluating PR output into determining and analysing the building blocks of communication.

The technique is based on academic research done by several academicians. It frees the study from bias in terms of either the person who is doing the analysis, the cultural background or the language in which the message has appeared. This is important because if the same person is doing the analysis at different periods of time or if different persons are doing the analysis at the same time and the results are different, then there is a problem with the evaluation process. Significantly, out of the 100 interpretations that our coders did, both in India and UK, showed a variation of only +/-5per cent.

The key word matrix

We break down the company reputation into five super themes:

How is the company managed/organised?

What products & services do they have?

How do they promote/market them?

Who do they employ?

How do they interact with third parties – unions, government, society, etc. and execute social responsibilities?

These five cover nearly the entire gamut of corporate reputation. Within each of these super themes we break down news items into several layers. These layers could come from various sources such as press releases, corporate literature, spokespersons, competition and media's own reportage. Subsequently, a matrix of key words is built for the company with super themes and layers within that.

What the key word matrix does is that it segments the coverage into various groupings. It ensures actionability of data by company departments, for example, if HRD is looking at the data, they can know the contribution of employees to corporate reputation and the matrix also

Possible outputs... provides direct comparative analysis with competitive companies.

Possible outputs could include overall message tone, tone of coverage tracked over a period of time, and reputation balance. Reputation balance indicates the contribution of the five super themes to the overall reputation – how much have the employees contributed to reputation, how much did the marketing lend to this effort, etc. Another output is to measure the main messages emanating -- how many are beneficial, factual or adverse.

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?

Sankara Pillai replied that it is very difficult to actually isolate the effect of just one input. ORG MARG has some products that look at shifts in the overall corporate image across time – *The Corporate Image Monitor* that monitors the image of companies across time. Sankara Pillai added that in the future, models can be built that will take all these into consideration. This kind of research is new to India and agencies are finding out ways of fine-tuning and honing their skills. But as in most other areas of market research, modelling across the lines of regression can be attempted and some kind of multi-varied technique can be developed to isolate the effects.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Sankara Pillai, GM Media Research Division, ORG MARG, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in New Delhi on November 2, 2000)