



THE PR PROFESSIONAL'S Definitive Guide to Measurement

CHAPTER 9

Be patient. We're learning.

Fritz Quinn



As the father of two boys, I often thought it would be easier if I could teach them to walk, talk and read in a matter of days. I'm sure anyone learning a new skill could relate, not just parents; why can't I just know this? Of course if that were possible, my sons would never learn anything for themselves and I wouldn't get to watch them cultivate their own unique capabilities built from their shared experiences.

The use of effective measurement in the public relations and communications field is in its toddler stage, and like toddlers, communications professionals or agencies shouldn't be expected to know everything overnight.

Communications functions add tangible value to our businesses; we wouldn't exist if we didn't. For a long time however, as a profession we've measured ourselves against marketing organizations, trying to demonstrate that a dollar invested in PR is just as effective as a dollar put towards marketing.

As a result we've thought about the measurement tools available to us, now and in the future, in a comparative fashion to what marketers are able to provide more easily.

If we approach measurement in that way, then ultimately how are we providing differentiated value from marketing colleagues? Marketing and public relations ought to complement each other, rather than view each other as combatants in a dog-fight for every available scrap of funding.

Unquestionably, communications activities support business objectives. With a more diverse and flexible set of digital media channels, tracking links and audience targeting, we can show a causal link between the stories we tell about our companies and ultimate customer behavior. But we don't do it in the same way as marketers do, even when we're using those exact same tools.

The key difference is "stories." Communicators show external stakeholders how our products and services fit into their lives through more emotional and often less direct methods. Primarily we can



Fritz Quinn pictured speaking at the AMEC Global Summit on Measurement in Bangkok.



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influence what we want customers to feel about us rather than direct what we want them to do. We are getting better at proving how we are doing that, but we're still learning.

Like any learning experience we're getting incrementally better, and the progress we are making is tangible. As an industry, we're being honest with ourselves and ferreting out the methods of quantifying our work that are either hocus pocus (AVEs...ahem), or less relevant in a digital media environment (e.g. clip counts).

With progress comes set-backs; some things aren't working necessarily as we expected. For example, in my company we have tested several hypotheses about how digital PR can be a more economical means of acquiring new customers. In some instances we were successful, but when compared directly against our traditional acquisition activities our PR efforts don't always prove superior.



These baby steps in testing and learning didn't lead us to the goal we expected. However the findings uncovered valuable new insights in other areas. We found that a large portion of prospective card members were abandoning card applications. With this discovery, we can now help our business improve its online application processes and have a direct effect on the number of customers we're bringing into our organization.

Beyond the stumbling stage, I believe that we can now demonstrate our PR activity is doing a more effective job of reaching our most valuable prospects and customers; improving their perception of our brand and inducing them to be more engaged with and loyal to our company over a longer period of time.

We're not ready to run. We haven't yet proved that in a way that I'm totally satisfied with, but there's enough promise there to continue to refine our methods in targeting outcomes to provide that more sustainable, tangible benefits to our business.



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We'd all like to be the hero, but no one is going to figure the trick of perfect PR measurement alone. As a profession, we will have to rely on the successes and mistakes of others to further refine our methods. We have to get comfortable experimenting with new measurement techniques, and our business clients need to get used to us talking in those terms.

The dashboard below is an example of where our baby steps have taken us so far. Yes, there are some more "traditional" metrics still in here; we're still in 'toddlerhood'. In addition, most people aren't used to seeing something like this come from their PR team.

Sample:

One of the best resources we have in developing this work and refining our methods are the PR agencies we work with. Agencies get a more in-depth view across a range of campaigns and industries; they can provide us with the clearest advice on what's working for others and how we might improve our own efforts. Most importantly, they can include "measurement" as a budget line in any project or campaign, providing a clear emphasis on the importance of that activity.

More effective measurement is only going to help communicators better-demonstrate the true results of our activities and improve the performance of our businesses. As a profession, I believe we're only scratching the surface of how we do that more efficiently.

We're getting more comfortable after our first wobbly steps. The more we test the limits, experiment and rely on the experience of others, the sooner we'll gain coordination and find a steady rhythm.

Fritz's Top 3 Measurement Tips

1. **Testing and learning rarely ever produces the results you expect; be open to what the data tells you in order to uncover valuable new insights in other areas. Search for the unknown along the way.**
2. **No one is going to figure the trick of perfect PR measurement alone. Lean on the successes and mistakes of other organisations to speed up the process. Industry events like the AMEC Global Summit are the perfect sort of forum to do that.**
3. **Rely on agency partners along the journey. They have a more in-depth view across a range of campaigns and industries to guide us with the clearest advice on what's working for others and how we might improve our own efforts.**



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