

A measure of your success

If you don't evaluate your work, how do you know it's got you to where you want to be?

Whether you're working agency side with a clear client brief or in-house and want to check the progress of your strategy, evaluation has to be an integral part of your planning process.

But with trimmed budgets and ever increasing pressures on our time, is it really worth the effort and expenditure? In a word – yes!

If you're reading this as a PR professional, or perhaps PR has simply fallen into your long list of responsibilities, I have good news – evaluation is your friend!

Evaluation gives PR managers or those responsible for overseeing PR activity the ability to prove with hard evidence that they have met organisational objectives.

OK, so it can seem like a bit of a chore, to continuously check progress against goals, or sit down at the end of a campaign to review whether it worked. But it really is worth it, and often means you can give yourself a big pat on the back for a job well done.

Evaluation presents an opportunity to build credibility for PR activity and prove what it can achieve. For agencies, it helps us to report back to clients. And for those working in-house, it helps defend your PR budget in times when purse strings are tight, while proving you're crucial to organisational success.

But with so many different ways to evaluate PR success, how do you know what's best? And what's just old hat?

- **AVE.** Favoured by some, dreaded by others, AVE stands for Ad Value Equivalent. This model gives PR coverage a monetary value. So if you generated a full page article in The Times, it would give the article the same value as a paid-for advert in the same publication, regardless of headline, tone, position in the paper, whether it contained your key messages or even positioned your organisation as you had intended. AVE stems from the old-fashioned view that PR coverage is basically free advertising. It's not! Third party endorsement and authoritative, credible third party coverage is worth more than any sales message simply placed in a paid-for space. And there are far better ways to prove the value of your work.
- **Press cutting analysis.** Still relied on by the majority of PR practitioners, press clippings can be analysed in terms of tone (positive, negative, neutral), number of articles placed, in what media, circulation and whether the clippings relayed the organisation's key messages. It's a simple technique still favoured by most and when done intelligently, can offer a good snapshot of your reputation and

awareness levels in the wider world. On the down side, it focuses on outputs only and fails to assess outcomes, for example did the article make the reader think or behave as you planned?

- **Social media monitoring.** Increasingly, we are measuring our footprint in the social media sphere. We can easily count the number of Tweets made, how many friends we've formed on Facebook, the number of posts to our Blog, or connections made on LinkedIn. But what is the true value of these figures to your organisation? Are you actually engaging with people that have influence over what others think about your organisation or brand? Are you reaching out to important stakeholders that can enhance your reputation? Or are you just simply building up a vast online network that has no impact whatsoever on your success?

If your organisational goal is to achieve £100,000 worth of press clippings, then great, opt for the old AVE model. If you want to compete with Ashton Kutcher and build a million Twitter followers, then simply count your online following. But good PR activity sets out to achieve so much more than that and sets clear aims and desirable outcomes from the outset.

Great PR campaigns start with research. If you want your communications activity to change attitudes, shift perceptions, encourage or alter certain behaviours, then you need to be measure what those attitudes, perceptions and behaviours are before you get going.

And you can do that by using techniques like interviews, surveys and focus groups, which surprisingly, needn't be expensive. Tools like SurveyMonkey have made it easier than ever to carry out simple market research. By putting in this effort at the start, you'll be in a position to measure actual outcomes at the other end and, by doing so, prove that the PR activity you're driving is contributing to organisational goals.

Without evaluation, there's no way of judging success of failure. Evaluation is a job worth doing. And worth doing well.

- [CIPR evaluation book](#)
- [SurveyMonkey](#)