

Aligning Buzz to Business

So how do you capture — let alone measure — buzz?

BY: CYNTHIA STINE

Savvy CEOs, business owners and important stakeholders are increasingly demanding to see a return on their company's public relations investment. Measuring PR return-on-investment (ROI) has always been a difficult proposition. There is seldom a direct correlation between how much an organization spends on PR and how much business it generates.

While the ultimate metric would be to determine the relationship of PR and market penetration, marketshare, sales, and profitability, it is also futile. It is nearly impossible to isolate PR and reliably quantify its impact on these key business objectives. In this regard, it is more useful to view PR as a tool in achieving these objectives.

Public relations is, at its core, about influencing public perceptions, increasing awareness of products and services, and promoting a positive reputation. To help measure the success of your PR programs and the effectiveness of using PR as a tool towards reaching your objectives, you may want to consider the following approach.

Measure Your Messages

Carefully read all documents and PR messaging authored and issued by your PR team: press releases, editorial pitches, speaking proposals, articles, and white papers. Ask yourself if your company's messages are effectively communicated and if appropriate grammar and tone are used.

Measure Your Audience

All the great press in the world is meaningless if it is not seen, read or heard by your target customer. Look at your press clippings. Do they appear in media outlets that reach your customer? How many of your target customer base are influenced?

Determine the Quality of Your Results

Counting the number and assessing the breadth of media placements is important, but quality is more so. When reviewing each article ask yourself:

- (1) *Is my core message amplified in the article?*
 - (2) *Does my product perform better than the competition's in the product review?*
 - (3) *Is the audience for the story one that can make buying decisions or influence the buyer?*
 - (4) *Does the placement give me an opportunity to tell a complex story, set the record straight, or re-position the competition?*
- ...



Cynthia Stine (left) is the President of Promote Success, a public relations firm that helps companies successfully compete against bigger and better-funded competitors.

Phone:
972.234.8846.

Email:
cynthia@promote
successpr.com

Value-weighting of articles is more important than volume.

Measure Short-term and Long-term Impact

To measure impact of your PR program, develop measurements for short- and long-term impact. PR that prompts specific action provides short-term measurements. These actions include calls, emails and website visits. PR that changes perceptions is measured over the long term.

Reputation, brand equity, market leadership...these are all critical measures of PR success. But it takes time to push that boulder uphill. You want to look at progress in terms of momentum built rather than accelerated growth. It will likely take a year or more before you make noticeable progress in building your brand, enhancing your reputation or establishing market leadership. The best way of measuring success is by querying industry analysts, customers, prospects, your competitors and other industry influencers to find out how you are perceived by them.

Measure the Buzz

We are constantly amazed at how many companies do not bother to measure their public relations or marketing activities at all. They have no system or process for quantifying the calls, emails and website hits that come to them let alone evaluating if they were influenced by the PR campaign. They don't know what their customers and prospects think about them now and have no way of determining if the relationship is building or falling apart. Even though these numbers will only represent a fraction of the audience truly impacted by your PR, you should at least know how many are taking action. ■