

Do you know where you're going to...?

Part 2 in a series exploring measurement in PR - You are the MD of a marketer. Some time back you felt the need to do some PR. A bright young go-ahead consultancy was employed. They have now called a meeting and dumped a whole pile of press cuttings to show the massive exposure they got for you.

By [Mike Leahy](#) 18 May 2003

A Media Manager analysis proves the Advertising Value Equivalent was gazillions of Rands. Wow!

But... somewhere in the back of your mind you say to yourself 'so what'. You know they have done well and you should be pleased with the return on the investment, but how pleased? Should they have got more, or better, or different, or more focused? Or...or...or... Where is the context?

As Diana Ross sung, "Do you know where you're going to...?" Because if you don't know where you are going to, and why, any road will take you there and you won't know when you've arrived!

This brings us to the most fundamental of all management processes, the setting of objectives, strategies and tactics and the measurement parameters for monitoring achievement of them. For without measurement parameters, management can't manage!

What is an objective, a strategy and a tactic?

Quite simply put, an objective is 'something one is trying to achieve or reach or capture'. (Some management texts define an objective as a broad aim and a goal as an objective made specific. For the purpose of this series we will make no such distinction.) Strategies - the planning and directing of the whole operation or war - are defined so as to fulfill objectives. And then tactics - the art of manipulating resources in a battle or campaign - are done so as to implement strategies.

But note the sequence. Both strategies and tactics are derived from objectives. Typically PR people are action-orientated and are focused into doing the work; that is implementing PR strategies and tactics. They tend to be less good at seeing the bigger PR picture. And even less effective at seeing the overall business scene.

Recognise then that PR objectives themselves should be derived from the overall objectives of the business. Hence PR objectives will be compatible and enhance the objectives of other functions within the business such as manufacturing; sales; finance; human resources; communication and promotions, including advertising, etc. Indeed, the multi-faceted role of PR makes it the communications function most likely to impact and integrate with the rest of the business. And this makes the construction of objectives doubly difficult.

That said, let us return now to PR specifically. Public relations objectives, strategies and tactics should be clear with regard to time and effect. Otherwise they are unspecified desires. For example, statements such as increasing maximum effect on stakeholders, launching the new brand, optimizing media exposure and creating a conducive media environment are remarkably common, but meaningless unless they are specified as to effect and time period.

So what effect do we want on the stakeholders? What do they believe as of right now? What exactly do we want our stakeholders believe or do? And what do we mean by launching the new brand? What is an optimized media exposure? Your optimum is not necessarily my optimum! And what is a conducive media environment? How will we know when we have one?

So let us define the measurement parameters for success. And let us not forget the time period in which we have to work. For without the two definitions, everything is meaningless.

Everything can be measured but...

Indeed everything can be measured one way or another. You just need a starting point, an end point and a means of comparing the difference between the two. Think of the ruler on your desk. Ah, you might retort, PR is different because so much of what we deal in are intangibles such as awareness, opinions and attitudes of stakeholders. But, intangibles can be measured, just ask any market researcher. It just comes at a cost. The problem is the cost of a moderate attitudinal study can easily exceed the cost of the PR activity it is measuring. This is less of a problem in more mature PR markets where professionals recommend spending 10% of the budget on research, tracking and monitoring, making sure that the other 90% is work the way it should.

So let us assume the worst-case scenario, you have no money for external research. How do we work around it? You just have to be more creative and look for measures that are available. Or, most likely, modify your objectives to ones that can be measured. Because what is the point of objectives that cannot be managed!

Measure PR activity only

Furthermore, measures you use should measure PR activity. Be careful of ascribing non-PR measures to PR as you might be held responsible for circumstances that are entirely outside of your control. (Although, the business is a roaring success you might be forgiven for collecting the credit. Advertising agencies are masters at this.) For instance management might use PR as one of the tools to protect its share price on the JSE. But the price itself should not be used as a measure because there are too many influencing factors

Next time we will discuss the difference between Effect and Affect. Meanwhile just quietly hum (or whistle) Diana Ross': "Do you know where you're going to..." And sing out loud when you spot an objective that cannot be measured!

ABOUT MIKE LEAHY

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