

## Add Muscle to Your PR Program Before Budget Time Hits

By Tara Tuckwiller

Reprinted with permission from *PRNews*, Vol. 59; Issue 36, September 22, 2003

If the evolution of PR measurement were being traced right now, it would probably be approaching the Neolithic Age, a period of tremendous change in human history.

For communication executives grappling with measurement, the tectonic plates have finally broken. (PR measurement tools have been around in one form or another since the early 1960s.) These days both corporate PR pros and their agency reps are less resistant to measurement and are growing more comfortable with the idea that, although PR is in many ways an art form, companies can inject some science to it.

In the current climate, vendors like Biz360, Cymfony, Delahaye Medialink, and PRtrak no longer have to spend all their time educating clients on the fundamental need for measurement tools, as early adopters give way to the many large/mid-size companies that are bringing measurement into the mainstream. In a dicey economy, communication executives spending as little as \$10,000 on a PR project require some kind of built-in ROI.

But achieving ROI is hardly the sole reason to adopt measurement tools; more on that a little later. Of course, there's still liable to be some blood on the floor when negotiating measurement deals, but communication executives are much less skeptical about measurement than they were even three years ago.

"I'd say we're in Year 3 or 4 of a 10-year process before measurement is incorporated into companies' everyday operations," says You Mon Tsang, founder and chief marketing officer of San Mateo, Calif.-based Biz360, whose Market360 is one of the main measurement tools in the market. "Folks are more motivated to take on measurement in this day and age, which is the way communication executives get bigger budgets." Tsang, whose clients include Harley Davidson, Sun Microsystems, and VeriSign, claims that Biz360's revenues have increased more than 100% this year compared with 2002. "If people weren't interested in measurement, we wouldn't be seeing that kind of growth."

David Michaelson, founder and president of marketing communications firm David Michaelson & Co, whose clients include ADP, GE Capital, and MetLife, and who has been dealing with measurement issues for the past two decades, says there's been a "sea change" in attitude among corporate communication execs about measurement.

"It's no longer a few lone wolves howling in the woods about measurement," says Michaelson, former head of research at Ogilvy PR and a current member of the IPR Commission on Measurement. "People are dissecting it in broader ways and that's an advance."

### The Fear Factor

Significant obstacles remain because many communication executives often view measurement as an either/or proposition. "As much people talk about it, there's a fear of measurement," Michaelson adds. "Do you really want to go to your boss and say, 'We didn't do a good job' on that project because we didn't get any return?"

Indeed, for communication executives, measurement presents a bit of Catch-22. They may not want to get in the C-suite's crosshairs by reporting lousy measurement results, but if they don't have some stick-to-itiveness about measurement — both good and bad — they will continue to risk having their budgets clipped.

The remedy is to view measurement in more holistic terms. Regardless of what measurement shows for one PR project, the onus is on PR executives to extract measurement information from one campaign that can be applied strategically to the next one, and so on and so forth.

It's not a question of pass or fail, but drilling down deep to see how measurement might apply to sales and attitudes and opinions about a brand.

"Measurement tools today are for PR success tomorrow," says Mark Weiner, CEO of Norwalk, Conn.-based Delahaye Medialink, which has a full suite of measurement services marketed to many Fortune 500 companies, including AT&T, General Electric, and FedEx. "The movement toward more

PR measurement is being driven by PR execs' internal clients to clearly demonstrate and generate ROI." But measurement is still new to many organizations, with just about 50% of PR professionals saying they have adopted measurement standards.

Cymfony's Brand Dashboard is another tool designed to evaluate media placements, with clients like PR/marketing services firm Brodeur Worldwide and Liberty Mutual Ins. Co. Andrew Bernstein, CEO of Newton, Mass-based Cymfony, a seven-year old company which launched its measurement products in 2001, is in chorus with his competitors that ROI is not the end-all for measurement. Measurement is Fun. Really.

"There's a lot of lip service to ROI, but when you can link measurement to how the company's stock price is doing, the effectiveness of publications used for messaging and how you stack up against your competitors, managers will do cartwheels," Bernstein says.

Software vendors are also trying to push the needle on measurement.

Dee Rambeau, Managing Partner of Denver-based DVCO Technology, a 3-year-old company whose main measurement product is called RelationsCentral, adds, "Measurement tools are great, but if you don't do any analysis there's no added- value." DVCO Technology's clients range from PR firms Magnet Communications and Alan Taylor Communications to Aspen Ski Co. and eBay on the corporate side.

A big part of the problem is that PR people, understandably, are generally not tech heads. "Ease of use is a much bigger factor than cost," adds Jason Keller, managing partner of DVCO Technology, who, like Rambeau, came from the PR business before getting into the technology space. PR pros "need more training on measurement but need to be PR marketing professionals first."

But in this market, training is a luxury. PR execs are "stretched really thin," says Gary Ghetto, vice president of Surveillance Data Inc., which owns PRtrak. "When push comes to shove, PR people would rather just get the publicity out, rather than measure it."

