

A Practical Introduction to PR Research



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Senior executives have begun to demand a measurable return on their investment in PR. Unfortunately, many PR professionals are unprepared to respond, and so we often hear many questions: “For years, we’ve needed to be more strategic as we plan and measure our public relations . . . and I want to. Our executives are beginning to require it. But what is the best way to proceed? Will the results prove the value of PR? And what if the research shows that PR *isn’t* performing?”

If these questions resemble your own, consider this: Without the proper research-based underpinnings, you may never quantify the extent of your accomplishments so that you can reinforce your success. And without a measurable, systematic approach to PR objectives-setting, strategy development, and evaluation, you may never know enough about your performance to make improvements when needed. And finally, without a scientific method to catalogue, understand, and apply what you learn to future endeavors, success will be fleeting rather than sustainable, and failures are bound to be repeated. The inevitable, unfortunate outcome of such an indeterminate state is that, while you’re in it, the world accelerates without you.

Much can be gained when the rigor of science is married to the art of PR: meaningful and positive business outcomes, market

supremacy, and professional advancement. The world's most admired companies understand and master their environment: they earn their reputations by studying themselves and then acting on what they see – the ugly as well as the sublime. The only passage out of uncertainty is a direct one through which action leads to knowledge, and knowledge and understanding lead to success.

Those companies and PR professionals who enjoy the benefits of research and evaluation begin by embracing the process fully: they relish their victories because they're validated and can be merchandized more credibly. They also understand that uncovering shortfalls is a natural result of the process, especially in the beginning, and that such shortfalls can be isolated and corrected. As a result, these well-informed practitioners lead with confidence and certainty.

So why don't more people use research and measurement?

PR people have many reasons for not conducting proper research. Some common objections appear below along with the proper response.

- ***The costs will outweigh the benefits. What will we find that we didn't already know?***

Yes, investment is required to undertake a serious PR research program. But the better question might be, "What is the cost of not proving and improving your value when your competitors are proving and improving theirs?"

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