How to be a Good Research Client

By Mark Weiner, CEO of PRIME Research-Americas

When most people think about beginning a PR research and evaluation program, they usually consider the responsibilities and requirements of their research partner: speed, accuracy, quality analysis and sage guidance. But beyond the responsibilities of the provider, each PR person hiring such a firm has a responsibility to be a good client. Through this balance, the relationship can be mutually beneficial and fully optimized.

Below are six useful guidelines to being a good research and evaluation client:

- **Rule One**: Be open, responsive, reasonable and curious. Nothing makes the researcher happier than a willing client who's interested in applying the findings of the research. Rather than "killing the cat," curiosity often begets a deeper level of insight. Feel free to question, probe and explore the data and the findings: Researchers love it.
- **Rule Two**: Provide complete information right from the start. Start-up delays lead to frustration all around. Don't leave it to your research partner to uncover all the facts by themselves. If the project is a content analysis of news coverage, for example, let the research

partner know about your target audiences, your media preferences and the major communications initiatives. Err on the side of excess by providing press releases, updated media lists, corporate backgrounders, product information briefings and anything else that the researchers may find useful working on your behalf. Another form of “complete information” is candor. Be candid and encourage candor from the researcher. If the program isn’t generating the desired outcome, speak with your researcher…sometimes program adjustments are warranted and easier to implement than it might appear.

- **Rule Three**: Make the program a “win/win.” It is reasonable to expect a solid return on your investment in PR research, but it’s also important to make sure that the victories for client and researcher are balanced. It’s fair to say that in exchange for accurate, timely data, solid analysis and sage guidance, your research firm deserves to make a reasonable profit. This keeps the relationship harmonious and ensures that your partner never hesitates to go the “extra mile” for wondering what will happen to their already too-thin bottom line.
- **Rule Four**: Don’t delegate the research management through too many layers. It’s not uncommon to see the senior PR executive who hires the research firm disengage once the contract is signed. As a result, programs may be slow or incomplete from the start. While it is essential to delegate, senior PR execs should be accessible and responsive when occasionally called upon for high-level guidance to ensure the best possible return on your investment in PR research and evaluation.
- **Rule Five**: Eliminate fear. While it happens infrequently, sometimes the research findings validate a shortcoming. This may be extremely difficult to accept. This isn’t to suggest that researchers don’t make

mistakes: They do. But rather than endlessly challenging the data, or intimidating the research firm to “revisit the data,” choose instead to learn from it: revisit your original objectives, tweak your program and move forward with the understanding that the great organizations became that way by learning from their successes as well as their failures.

- **Rule Six**: Select the right PR research firm in the first place. Public relations research, evaluation and analysis come in several flavors: basic tabulators; fully- automated dashboards; and at the high end, research-based consultants. While one tier builds on the other, you can avoid frustration by managing expectations at the outset: Don’t expect a tabulator to provide strategic advice (look for accurate data), don’t expect a computerized dashboard to understand the nuances of a complex issue, and don’t expect a high-end research-based consultant to be the least expensive option.

As more and more PR programs embrace public relations research and evaluation, and as those who have already deployed research-based public relations programs become more sophisticated, the time may soon come when you require the services of an outside firm specializing in this area. Not every organization has the same requirements, but a good relationship with your research partner is essential. Follow these simple guidelines to ensure the most favorable outcome.

To read more learn more about corporate communications research and evaluation, visit the PRIME blog at https://www.prime-research.com/-index.php/blog

About the Author: Mark Weiner is CEO of PRIME Research Americas. PRIME is among the world's largest PR research firm with 500 analysts and consultants employed in ten service centers around the globe. Mark is the author of "Unleashing the Power of PR" published by John Wiley & Sons. To learn more about PRIME, visit www.prime-research.com for additional information.

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