

The 10 Percent Rule Is a Myth: Six Smarter Ways to Determine the “Right Amount” for PR Research

In this second monthly installment of “Myths that are Killing PR,” we explore the conventional wisdom surrounding budgeting for public relations research.



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In a reflection of [PR's](#) maturity, research and evaluation are now routinely required by marketing and communications investment decision-makers. As a result, the question of “should we measure?” has been supplanted by “how much should we spend to measure?”

The conventional wisdom of [marketing](#) and communication has long governed that “ten percent for research” is the right number, a number which is several times greater than the average. And while many within the PR research community would be happy to see a higher allocation, the suggestion that there is a specific investment threshold is misdirected. Like so many of the “rules” of marketing and communications, the ten percent rule is a myth. The fact is, the proper percentage of spend depends entirely on the specifics of the situation.

Consider the following scenarios:



- **What's the potential impact of the campaign?** If you are responsible for launching the next game-changer—a cure for cancer or an auto-drive sports car—a 20% allocation in the pre-launch phase may be inadequate. Alternatively, for a campaign intended to simply milk a dying brand, 1% may be too much
- **What are the “real dollars” represented by the percentage?** If you represent a huge multinational with an \$80 million PR budget, 3% may seem low but it amounts to \$2.4 million of your annual budget. That's more than almost anyone need spend on research. On the other hand, a small brand needing a market analysis may be required to invest a minimum amount of actual dollars to conduct reliable research and that dollar amount may represent a relatively high percentage
- **To what degree do you rely on PR to drive the business?** If you work for an organization that prioritizes PR over other forms of marketing, the investment that might go to marketing research in some marketing-centric brands may instead consolidate under PR. In this case 10% may be just right. On the other hand, the organization that emphasizes advertising might siphon budget from PR

research to support its priorities

While budgeting depends on a given set of circumstances, blindly following the “conventional wisdom” will almost certainly lead to problems. Better to create your own wisdom in advance of budgeting. Consider the following guidelines for determining your public relations research budget:

1. **What are your organization’s objectives?** Relate your organization’s activities and investments to its overall goals and objectives. *Not doing so* is a surefire path to failure.
2. **What are your department’s objectives?** Just as a PR department must support the *organization’s* priorities, so too must the research support the *department’s* objectives. Poor or no alignment to the department’s goals leads to irrelevancy...or worse.
3. **What other departments will be affected?** In order to establish the optimal PR research plan, determine the impact, if any, on other departments. Don’t go through the planning process without consideration for others. It’s risky, less effective and could be counterproductive. On the other hand, they may be investing in research through which you can align to save time and money
4. **What other programs are currently under way?** Make sure you know whether coincidental initiatives—marketing and communication research programs, for example—are in process. Often, decentralized departments find coordination impossible. Nonetheless, it is essential that you know what else might be in play and how these initiatives may affect one another.
5. **How will you use what you learn?** Research is an essential step in PR planning and evaluation. While you may not know in advance every aspect of how your

research findings will be applied, have a strong sense of what the research will reveal so that every dollar you invest will be properly directed towards that goal and the greatest returns.

6. Who are your internal clients and how do they feel?

Ultimately, the determination of success or failure resides with the executives who provide funding. Understanding their expectations and preferences for PR activities and outcomes can be difficult... not knowing how they feel in advance is risky. It is essential to understand (and get clear agreement on) the measures by which your success will be planned and evaluated.

Research is a core element in public relations but it need not be mysterious, expensive or complicated. One way to ensure that your **PR research** arrives on time, on budget and yields the right results is to begin creating organizational—rather than *conventional*—wisdom by recognizing your aspirations and limitations before spending the first dollar.

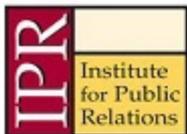
About the Author: Mark Weiner is CEO of PRIME Research Americas, a research-based consulting firm combining talent with tools to serve clients through our network of analysis hubs in the USA, Brazil, England, Switzerland, Germany, India and China. To learn more, visit www.prime-research.com or contact Mark directly at weiner@primeresearch.com. Make plans now to attend the 2016 Institute for Public Relations/PRIME Research Strategic Communication and Measurement Conference, June 9 in New York City. [Register here](#).

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