

What PR Measurement Can Offer: Telling Truth to Power

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I have observed and professionally participated in PR measurement and evaluation for over three decades.

One might learn a lot over time.

Bottom Line

A [PR](#) person (or agency or internal organization) needs to have the courage and confidence to confront organizational partners and force the discussion: *What is Really Going On?* The responsible, research-oriented PR person must be grounded in verifiable facts about the market, not with the aspirations of the client.

Integration of marketing and communications . . . No, We don't need that.

The discussion within the PR profession about “marketing” vs “communications” vs “reputation management” is always relevant. But that discussion entirely misses the critical point that really faces PR agencies and consultancies.

The most sophisticated “marketers” have data-driven technologies that most PR people do not have access to (and may not understand), and the client data teams don't always want the PR people to understand.

The most sophisticated “communications professionals” are thereby conflicted and unsure of themselves. Partially, because they don't fully understand the implications of the information technology. Partially, because their corporate

leadership gives unclear guidance within the political context. Partially because PR people are rarely kept in the loop by government relations teams. PR people, in best scenarios, provide insight and context; PR people are too often expected to put lipstick on a pig.

“Public relations” today is now mostly a “middle management” function. If something “important” is going on, the client will call in the data scientists or will call in the lawyers or will call in the international fixers (K-Street lobbyists, McKinsey, Deloitte, etc.). (PR, if lucky, will get a call later in the day.)

The Critical Role for PR and PR Monitoring and Measurement

Yet, in this high-pressure environment, the need for objective, transparent, monitoring of “what’s really going on” is greater than ever. Monitoring and analysis of all media (separated from agenda-setting or advocacy-driven functions (marketing, litigation) is critical for senior organizational management to make decisions. Only an independent public relations monitoring, measurement, and analysis can provide the insights that organizational management requires.

The traditionally structured PR agencies and corporate PR departments do not need a new “integrative” role. The PR agencies and the departments need to adhere to their core strength – to report to the client / boss *what is really happening* in the media environment; to provide objective insight into the organization’s relationships with its publics as documented by the media.

If in reporting independent, objective media monitoring and analysis (telling Truth to Power) gets the PR people fired, then the PR people need to get used to being fired or get used to collusion and collaboration with organizations not concerned about truth and facts.

Public relations professionals and organizations cannot fudge the question: Are you and your organization driven by facts/evidence? Or are you and your organization driven by interest/advocacy?

Public relations researchers are at the ethical fulcrum.

Trivial as it may sound, the real value of public relations research is still Telling Truth to Power. (Otherwise, public relations research is just another form of self-preservation and covering-your-assets).



About the Author: Franklin Walton, Ph.D., Principal, [Franklin Walton LLC](#), worked nearly 40 years in senior management positions at Ruder Finn and RFBinder. He also held full-time and adjunct positions at CUNY, NYU, and University of Illinois. He served for a decade as a member of the Measurement Commission at the Institute for Public Relations.