

Launch of new media relations measurement paradigm levels playing field

Evaluation of media coverage has always been a problem. Credibility was always at the mercy of the many different paradigms used to calculate reach and quality -- until now.

After four years in development under the leadership of Tracey Bochner, APR, Senior Vice President, APEX Public Relations, her group of senior agency, industry and client side media relations specialists has launched the Media Relations Ratings Points (MRP) system, in partnership with the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS).

To understand how valuable this media relations measurement paradigm is, look at how media relations evaluation has been conducted previously.

Generally, it starts with the audience numbers. Then a multiple is applied to arrive at impressions. Traditionally, multiples for print can range from two times to 10 times, depending on the evaluator. "For broadcast, if you called an outlet and asked different people who work there on both the editorial and sales sides, you would probably get different answers on the 'reach' because those numbers depend on how that department reports the numbers which could be total show reach, quarter-hour audience reach or even total station reach," Bochner observes.

MRP provides consistency. The system uses standardized data on print readership, and provides BBM numbers for broadcast, which are often inaccessible to PR firms unless they have official advertising agency status or ad agency partners. The cost for the data is modest (and there is a discount for CPRS members). The measurement template and user guide is free to anyone to download at www.cprs.ca.

All of the audience data, including website audience information, is provided by News Canada, which won the RFP. "We're delighted to be working on this project and believe it is very important to clients to have a common media relations measurement paradigm," says Ruth Douglas, President, News Canada.

What MRP does not do is provide advertising equivalencies, and rightfully so. That form of measurement has at least a few problems. Firstly, editorial cannot be purchased and therefore cannot have an advertising equivalency. As Bochner puts it: “You simply cannot buy media coverage!” Secondly, editorial often has far more third-party word of mouth generation power than does advertising. Bochner adds that “you can’t buy space on the front page, above the fold, so how would you measure that through ad equivalencies? It doesn’t make any sense.”

In a nutshell, the MRP system provides a score based on standardized criteria that incorporate tone as well. The tone plus the ratings generate an overall percentage score. “In the tests we have done to date with our clients, we consider 75% or above a good campaign,” notes Bochner. The system also works out a cost per contact (this is where the standardized reach data becomes useful), “so our clients can demonstrate ROI to their stakeholders and evaluate a program’s success compared to other campaigns,” says Bochner.

For more information on MRP, go to www.cprs.ca or contact Tracey Bochner at tbochner@apexpr.com.

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A proverbial needle in an electronic haystack

A combination of the new copyright law, the trend towards subscription-based news media websites (and subsequent silos from web search engines and other media monitoring services), has made the media monitoring task feel like a search for a needle in an electronic haystack at times.

“With copyright licensing and high technology investment, media monitoring definitely has gotten more expensive,” says John Weinseis, President, Bowdens Media Monitoring Ltd. “But the results have also improved dramatically in terms of speed and quality. New services have been developed by many participants to provide multi-media portal based delivery along with rudimentary analysis. The bigger concern seems to be the ability to weed out irrelevant material.”

One very senior and savvy Toronto-based practitioner uses at least seven different services to provide her clients with accurate and timely media monitoring reports. Media monitoring services have been hindered by these new regulatory and competitive realities, while at least one senior independent media relations practitioner thinks of throwing in the towel some days because the media monitoring task has become so expensive and time consuming.

"Our number one goal is to provide a one-stop monitoring service to our clients across multiple platforms. That's why we're focused on developing partnerships that allow us to