

Chapter 2

Proving The Value of PR: Why Measurement
Is Important

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I must admit, explaining, 'why measurement is important' in PR can feel a little weird these days. I'd put it in the same bracket as explaining why healthy eating, recycling or wifi are important.

Most people accept these things are necessary and many of us celebrate them as virtues. So when people disagree, or need their arms twisting, it can give the impression they're from a slightly different era.

I guess you could say PR measurement is now pretty mainstream.

The debate about its relative value is over. Adoption is widespread and growing.

It's now hard to imagine a return to the days of zero measurement or clipbooks, especially given the huge amounts of accessible data we now have at our fingertips. To go backwards would feel like a terrible retrograde step, wouldn't it? Perhaps not quite in the same league as abandoning healthy eating, recycling or wi-fi, but retrograde nevertheless. I mean really, no wifi?

In 2015 potential employers and clients often make their agency selections based on how evaluation will be tackled.

Procurement teams look for evidence-based returns-on-investment. PRs have earned a seat at the top table because we can quantify and qualify the real value of our work - and our advice, service and content is evidence-based.

The work we do is informed by audience research and measurement.

The real-time content we produce is often iterative and incrementally developed by where the data leads us. Team assessments are often based on campaign performance. Many of us are learning to improve how we work by reflecting on what evaluation reports tell us.

However, not everything in the world of PR measurement is rosy.

Adoption may be widespread but some people still cling to old measures that don't take fundamentals such as quality or impact into account. Just as 20 years ago we were comfortable with clip books stuffed full with glued-in coverage – so today we're getting a little too comfortable with tables of hits and impressions.

For me, these only highlight scale, not the power of PR to change people's awareness, perceptions and behaviours – or change lives for that matter. A colleague uses the line "let's not use data in the same way a drunk uses a lamppost – for support instead of illumination" and he's right - we mustn't ignore measurement's primary quality.

As individuals and teams we now find ourselves in a competitive environment that requires a 'prove everything' mind-set. Creative ideas and strategic insight must be rooted in data.

The impact of our work must be measured not in outputs, but actual outcomes and business results. And the value of our service must be expressible in the precise terminology of business, not the vagaries of PR.

The phoney war between those who set data against creativity is finished. Instead, the two can be seen as a team, working together to push communication forward.

The real value of PR measurement is in how it can evidence your performance, offer better, richer human insights and bring about continuous improvement not only to your business, but also to your communications.

If you aren't measuring your effect on the bottom line you may not be adequately proving your whole worth, optimising your campaigns or improving your skill sets.

By missing these opportunities you risk presenting yourself as a professional from a bygone era. A person with an analogue and cavalier mindset in a digital, evidence-based and financially responsible age.

The kind of person who doesn't bother with wifi.

And seriously, what kind of person doesn't bother with wifi?

David Gallagher's Top 3 Measurement Tips

- ✓ The age of measuring outcomes in PR is well and truly upon us.
- ✓ Avoid measurement at your own peril – and with significant opportunity costs.
- ✓ A commitment to measurement is as much an industry issue as a differentiator for individual competitors.

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