

Chapter 6

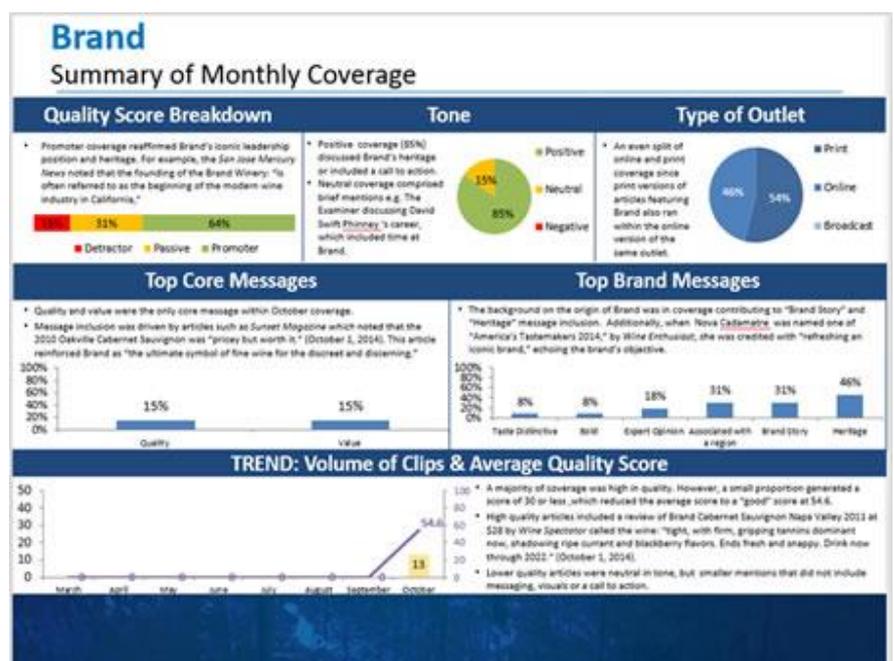
What's the big deal about the Barcelona Principles – and where do we go from here?
David Rockland & Allison Szeliga



The Barcelona Principles are a set of seven principles that provided the first overarching framework for effective public relations (PR) and communication measurement. First created in 2010, and refreshed in 2015, they identify the importance of goal setting; the need for outcomes, instead of outputs-based measurement of PR campaigns; the exclusion of ad value equivalency metrics; the validity of quantitative and qualitative measurements; the value of social media; and call for a holistic approach to measurement and evaluation.

Each Principle highlights many of the quantitative and/or qualitative approaches practitioners can follow, as well as also accepted methodologies to put these Principles into practice.

You may be thinking “this sounds like a logical and sensible approach.” If so, we’ve achieved what we’ve set out to do – create a guide for practitioners to incorporate the ever-expanding media landscape into a transparent, reliable, and consistent framework.



You may also be thinking “so what’s the big deal?”

If so, you must remember that when originally unveiled in 2010, the Barcelona Principles meant big changes for some, particularly those that still used metrics such as AVEs and multipliers. The Barcelona Principles provide both guidelines to measure efficacy of communication campaigns AND provide a basis to enable the replacement of outdated program measurement models that included AVEs and multipliers.

Why was this a big deal?

For most of the fifty or so years PR has been around as a defined marketing and communications practice, measurement was basically around number of clips, number of impressions and AVEs. The latter placed the value of PR as the cost of purchasing the equivalent amount of advertising space.

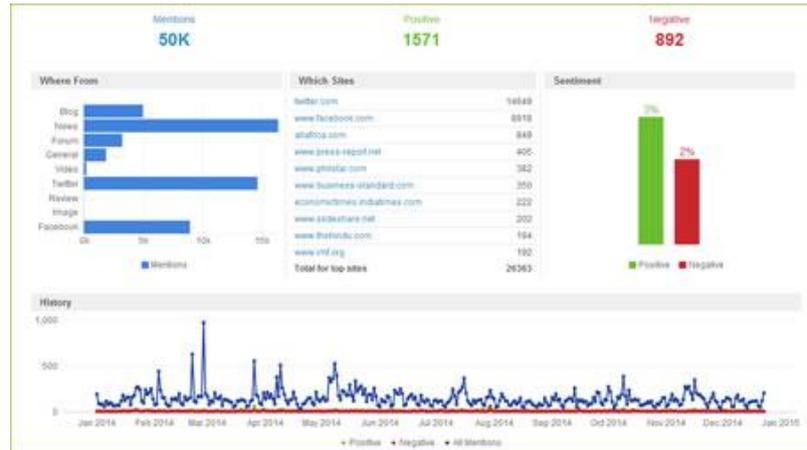
Back in the day, PR practitioners would then multiply that cost by anywhere from 2 to 7 claiming that earned media was that much more valuable than paid media. What was wrong with this picture?

- Clips and impressions alone are meaningless – what if all the clips say that the particular product is terrible, or that the company is run by criminals? Quality, including consideration of tone and messaging, has to be a consideration, as does whether or not the articles are reaching the right audience. If you are selling lipstick, an article in a hunting magazine probably has little value to you. Conversely, if you are selling tires, a feature piece in a high-end fashion magazine may not hit your core target consumer.
- It may seem silly to say set goals first, but often communication practitioners have done some exciting program that has little to actually do with the driving the business of the client or organization. You may have created a campaign that’s trending on Twitter, but if it didn’t drive sales, it was just short-lived buzz.
- As for AVEs, why would the cost of advertising be equal to the value of communication? The cost of advertising isn’t equal to the value of advertising. And, if the articles are negative, why would they be given a positive value? In advertising, you get to say what you want, where you want, and when you want. With earned media in particular, you are subject to the vagaries of the editorial process – sometimes you win, and sometimes you don’t. On the other hand, it is often much less expensive than a multi-million dollar ad buy, and with an editorial endorsement can have a much larger impact on sales.
- And, is earned media always more valuable than advertising? While we would like this to be true since we work for a firm that produces earned media for clients, the reality is that such multipliers have been proven over and over to not exist generally.

Luckily, the communication measurement and evaluation world is maturing. One reason this has come about is that getting data around press coverage is way cheaper than it has ever been.

When we started work at Ketchum, junior staff painstakingly clipped articles by hand, literally pasting them in a book, and delivering that book as proof of value at the end of the quarter or year.

Now, with digital aggregators, getting the coverage is simple and relatively much less expensive. With social media tools, you can get lots of data very quickly. And when you add the additional layer of evaluation – the actual process of using data to make a judgement on value and effectiveness of communication – it can help us understand and convey “the why” behind the quantitative outcomes.



Another reason communication measurement and evaluation is maturing is also a shift from counting earned media to counting what is much more important – target audience change and organizational results. Now, you can add a few questions to a brand or advertising tracking survey and know if and what communication overall, including PR, is creating awareness, favorability, purchase and recommendation.

And, with earned media data now much easier and cheaper to get, you can add it into market mix and other statistical models to show the effects of earned media on sales, brand equity and even organizational performance. In other words, you can do with all communication – including PR – what has been done for advertising, direct mail and other marketing channels for a long time.

The playing field has been levelled, but part of that levelling is also the understanding of how different channels affect one another. When we do market mix modelling for clients, what we often find is that each channel not only has its own effects on sales, but also tends to affect the other channels. In other words, advertising and PR, for example, benefit one another. One plus one becomes three.

This is mindset in particular is important given that we work in an integrated communication environment, thus measurement and reporting must be integrated. This means integration across geographies (global and local), across methods (quantitative and qualitative), and across channels (including paid, earned, owned and shared media). The fact is, PR doesn't exist in a silo, and we can no longer act in a silo.

Is the maturation of communication measurement complete? No, far from it. But, the Barcelona Principles started the process. From it has emerged a measurement framework that can help all communication practitioners that really bring the Principles into daily practice. And, we will continue to see certification programs in communication measurement that define what a professional needs to know before he/she can really call themselves a communication professional.

Who's driving this?

Well, certainly, AMEC and ICCO have got the ball rolling and are continuing to make progress.

However, what is also heartening to see it lots of others have jumped on board and adopted the Barcelona Principles including PR firms and PR member organizations around the world, Government teams, and companies and organizations of all sizes, including large corporations such as FedEx and Philips. Many companies like our own have been leading this charge with our clients and the associations we belong to. We see that our business is really driven by the edict “prove everything or die.”

As practitioners, we must always be prepared to prove our value and the ROI of communication. But if we don’t complete the switch from silly metrics such as AVEs to sales and ROI measurement, we will no longer be relevant to our clients. As a set of professional measurement guidelines and practices, our goal is to ensure that the Barcelona Principles continue to act as a baseline that professionals can use today and in the future.

David & Allison's Top 3 Measurement Tips

- ✓ Read and understand the Barcelona Principles. Available at amecorg.com
- ✓ When you report results, place them in the context of the business objectives of the organization as well as against the goals of the communications program you are measuring
- ✓ Ask yourself how you can move your measurement program to the next level, whether it be to add a quality dimension to media measurement if you are only counting clips, or from a change in consumer perception to its impact on business performance



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