



CHAPTER 7

Why we are saying “No to AVEs”

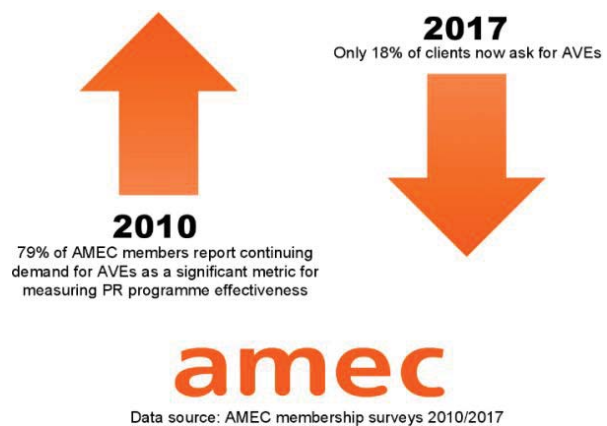
Richard Bagnall



You might wonder why AVEs are still even a subject of discussion. For at least the last 20 years their merits (tip: there really aren't any!) and issues have been widely debated in the industry.

In 2010 the global PR industry came together to condemn them. Over 200 PR and evaluation professionals from 33 countries and industry leading organisations including ICCO / PRCA, IPR, PRSA and Global Alliance met at AMEC's Global Summit on Measurement to declare the Barcelona Principles. Perhaps the most famous of these 7 principles was the fifth which states very simply “AVEs are not the value of communication”.

In the ensuing years, real progress has been made. In 2010, AMEC's global survey of its members showed that about 80% of global clients were still demanding AVEs as a metric as part of their evaluation programmes. Since then, that number has been in steep decline such that by this year, the same survey showed that demand had fallen to just 18%. But hang on! There lies the problem – that's still almost one in five organisations demanding that an invalid metric be provided as a part of their measurement.



This has real ramifications. For as long as there remains a demand in the industry for AVE, there will still be companies willing to supply it. And while AVEs exist as a metric, we will continue to see some parts of the media and our marketing cousins focus on the wrong things when looking to demonstrate the value of communication and PR. Witness this [recent headline](#) in Bloomberg reporting on the 'Fearless Girl' campaign – which went on to win the Grand Prix Cannes PR Lions Award: “The Fearless Girl Is Worth \$7.4 Million in Free Publicity for State Street”

Why this declining latent demand lingers on like a bad smell is one of the great mysteries of our time. There are literally no thought leaders, articles or credible research advocating their use. To the contrary, there are many explaining why they are invalid, including an article as part of AMEC's campaign which clearly lists [22 reasons not to use them](#).



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The answer perhaps lies in a number of places:

1. Because AVEs have a £/\$ sign in front of them, they are confused as an ROI metric on communications;
2. AVEs are easy number to produce and use and require no thought;
3. They almost always generate big numbers, certainly a lot bigger than the cost of a campaign;
4. The global PR market is evolving at different speeds – demand from the emerging markets is far greater than in the more mature markets like the USA and Europe;
5. There is a reasonably high churn rate of professionals in the PR and communications industry;
6. And most new entrants into PR and communications do not have a relevant vocational further education qualification. Those that do tend to have received very little education on planning, research and evaluation as part of their course.

Which all might explain why renowned industry commentator Stephen Waddington of Ketchum believes [it will take a generation](#) to see real change.



AMEC has greater ambitions than this however, and seeks to accelerate the end of AVE's. That's why we are investing so heavily into our education programme to do all that we can to ensure that all constituents in the communications sector understand why they are a flawed metric and that better options are available.

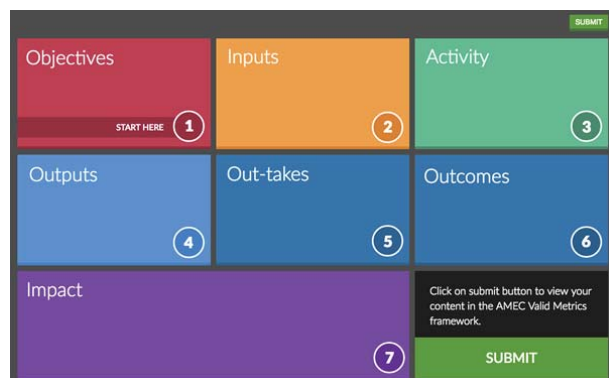
As part of this, AMEC has invested heavily into launching [the Integrated Evaluation Framework](#) (IEF) and its accompanying evaluation resource centre. The IEF is a free-to-use, interactive, online tool that takes users on a step-by-step process through the whole planning, implementation and evaluation journey. The resource centre has all of the information and support that anyone could wish for looking to learn more about communications measurement and evaluation.

The IEF allows users to create their own account and build their communications plan, aligning communications objectives to those of the organisation, setting targets, establishing key audiences, defining KPIs and identifying what success would look like. It then walks the user through measuring the outputs, outtakes, outcomes and, crucially, the organisational impact of your work.

At each step of the process the framework provides additional information and suggests potential approaches and metrics that might be appropriate to consider.

Once completed, the measurement plan can be saved and downloaded and used to tell the measurement story in a clear and credible manner.

The [IEF has received widespread support](#) and is acknowledged as best practice. It is available in 17 different languages and is in use all around the world. This includes being taught on





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academic courses, at leading PR agencies and within inhouse departments as well.

For AMEC's campaign for better measurement to be successful, we need your help. AVEs will only disappear completely when all parts of the industry work together and speak with a consistent voice. Educators, academics, in-house practitioners, PR agencies, communications trade associations and the monitoring and analytics vendors all need to work together with unified messaging to make sure that this latent demand dwindles and finally dies.

- If you're a PR practitioner who agrees, please share and link this e-paper to help us spread the message.
- If you're a communications professional who is being asked by your line manager or your finance director for an AVE, we hope that the information in this e-paper and at [AMEC's IEF resource centre](#) will help you to explain why it is not a good idea.
- If you're a student learning about PR and communication evaluation, please share this e-paper and AMEC's IEF online resource centre with your course director and fellow students.
- If you work at a PR agency and are under pressure from your client to provide an AVE, we hope these resources will help you explain to the client why it makes no sense.
- If you represent a communications trade association, please get behind AMEC's Say No to AVEs campaign and link, share and help promote our work.

By all of us working together, in the same way that the PRCA, ICCO and AMEC already do, we can help professionalise the industry and the ways in which it is measured and evaluated for the better.

Richard's Top 3 Measurement Tips

1. AVEs are an invalid, meaningless metric and their use is in steep decline. AMEC has provided a list of 22 reasons that AVE's should not be used. If you're still under pressure to provide them from powerful voices in your organisation, this list will help you.
2. There are much better ways to measure the value of your work. AMEC's Integrated Evaluation Framework and resource centre will guide you through the entire process, simply and easily. Please use it!
3. It is critical for the communications industry to speak with one clear voice on what best practice evaluation looks like. Please help AMEC by joining our campaign, rejecting lazy metrics, and promoting the framework within your organisation and to your peer group. Working together we can succeed.



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