PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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As the NLRB Cracks Down, It's Time For a Refresh on Social-Media Policy

The National Labor Relations Board has been ordering some prominent brands to scale back social-media policies that limit what workers can say about their organizations online—which could put communicators who handle such policies on edge.

The NLRB has instructed **Costco**, **General Motors** and **Target,** among others, to change the language in their social policies, and have issued the reinstatement of workers fired for posting negative comments about their work.

Here's an example of the NLRB's handiwork, as it struck down the following passage in Costco's social-media policy document: "Employees should be aware that statements posted electronically (such as [to] online message boards or discussion groups) that damage the company, defame any individual or damage any person's reputation, or violate the policies outlined in the Costco Employee Agreement, may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment."

This is how the NLRB interpreted the passage: "By its terms, the broad prohibition against making statements that 'damage the company, defame any individual or damage any person's reputation' clearly encompasses concerted communications protesting [Costco's] treatment of its employees." Since protected communications were not excluded from Costco's broad policy, the NLRB determined that employees would reasonably conclude that the policy required them to refrain from

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(DID YOU KNOW?)

7 Things You Will Learn in This Week's Issue of *PR News*

1. The National Labor Relations Board is cracking down on what it considers flawed social-media policies of some big brands. (p. 1)
2. The AMEC Valid Metrics Framework builds on the Barcelona Principles, which set the tone for more effective PR measurement. (p. 1)
3. Close to three-quarters of companies plan to spend more on "big data" in 2013. (p. 3)
4. More CEOs are using online video to promote their company narratives. (p. 3)
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Measurement

By Angela Jeffrey

AMEC's Valid Metrics Framework: Magic Measurement Bullet?

My guess is you've heard of the Barcelona Principles, which were created in 2010 by five major PR industry associations including the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communications (AMEC) and the Institute for Public Relations (IPR). The seven principles were a major step toward developing standards and professionalizing how we approach PR measurement.

But you may not have heard about the AMEC Valid Metrics Framework, which were developed by an AMEC task force following the launch of the Barcelona Principles, and provide the nitty-gritty framework needed to execute on Barcelona thinking.

The philosophy behind the guidelines states that to truly demonstrate the value of PR, metrics need to be linked to the business objective of the program, and move beyond measuring outputs to measuring outcomes. The Framework helps you identify suitable metrics for PR and social media programs that take you from cursory to meaningful measures that resound with the C-suite and help you refine your programs.

I've now had the privilege of working with several clients who needed help crafting measurement methodologies and found the AMEC Framework to be a veritable "magic bullet" in my toolkit. I've chosen to reprise it here in the hope that it might become of great help to you.

THE MATRICES

The Valid Metrics Framework, which can be found on amecorg.com, is realized in eight matrices that have been applied to the following types of campaigns: Brand/Product Marketing; Reputation Building; Issues Advocacy/Support; Employee Engagement; Investor Relations; Crisis/Issues Management and Not-for-Profit, Social/Community Engagement.

Within the matrices, three phases have been defined to reflect a simplified breakdown of how PR works: The messages or story is created and

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PRN

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How *Big* is Big Data for PR Execs?

When compared in stature with its business buzzword brethren—"gamification," "freemium," "intellectual capital," etc.—"big data" holds its own quite well. A recent study by **Infogroup** and **Yesmail Interactive** supports that conclusion. The study finds that marketers plan to go on a big data spending spree in 2013, hiring employees and building systems to keep up with the fire hose of information being generated by a growing number of digital and social channels.

The study, which took the pulse of 700 marketers, found that nearly 70% of companies plan to spend more on data initiatives in 2013. More than half of the respondents plan on adding people to oversee their data efforts this year.

The study also said that the big-data trend will significantly impact corporate budgets in 2013, as marketers place a growing emphasis on analytics, real-time data and integrated multichannel marketing.

The $64,000 question: We now know what big data means to marketers in 2013, so what does it mean specifically to PR executives? Just how big should big data figure into communications plans?

Mark Weiner, CEO of **PRIME Research** North America, says the term isn't new. "Big data is being used in quotations as if it's a new idea," Weiner says. "Really, lots data has been available to a lot of people for quite some time."

Leading today's big data explosion is technology that's enabling the collection of more data—like social media, supermarket scanning data and chips embedded in credit cards—and the technology surrounding the warehousing of such data, Weiner says.

So while there's always been a plethora of data, the challenge has been making sense of it, Weiner says. "The assumption has been that PR is behind the data curve when compared to advertising and marketing," he says. "It's true that PR has been slower to adapt, but it's also been more open in recognizing the challenges."

Don Patrick, president of **Infogroup Targeting Solutions**, agrees that dealing with data is a problem for PR. Which is why more resources are being tapped to handle big data. The biggest pitfall: "People try to solve the problem in one huge play, and it's an incremental play," says Patrick. "You get data, analyze it and know exactly where you want to go from a customer perspective."

SOCIAL DATA

With many PR executives pulling the social media strings, social data is becoming the PR equivalent to marketing's big data. The study found that this year 80% of respondents plan to use more of customers' social media data to drive campaigns in other channels.

"Social media is crossing borders within organizations, so it's not just within PR," Weiner says. In a way, social data helps PR executives level the playing field with marketing. While representing a small percentage of marketing spend, social media PR drives a disproportionate positive volume in sales, Weiner says.

The study also provides additional insights into data and communications trends Among the findings:

- The majority of marketers use insights from customer data to drive marketing campaigns on their website (83%), email (72%) and social media (59%).
- Less than half use customer data to drive marketing campaigns through the offline channels of direct mail (47%), print (32%) and telemarketing (30%).
- Almost half the respondents say their website is the best source of gathering customer data, followed by email (19%) and social media (12%).

Bottom line: PR programs can certainly benefit from big data, but it requires a disciplined, strategic approach—something that PR executives now are more in tune with. PRN

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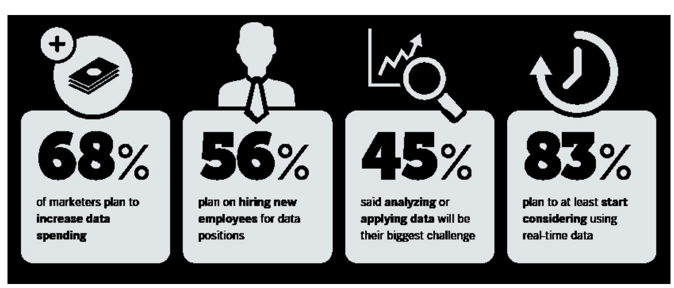
Companies Ramp Up Budget, Staffing for Big Data Initiatives in 2013; Where Does PR Fit In?



Marketers are into big data in a very big way this year, with nearly 70% increasing their data spending and close to 60% hiring employees to manage data, including analysts and executives.

Source: Infogroup/Yesmail Interactive

► Quick Study

Top CEOs Engaged Online—Just Not on Social Networks; Emotional Aspect of Customer Service Most Critical

► CEO Sociability Nearly Doubles in Two Years: The online sociability of the world's largest company CEOs rose dramatically in the past two years, says a **Weber Shandwick** study. In 2012, 66% of CEOs of the world's top 50 companies engaged online compared with 36% in 2010. Other study highlights include:

- The two-year growth spurt comes directly from CEOs' heightened visibility on their company websites (32% to 50%) and on online video (18% to 40%).
- The 50% of CEOs who are visible on their company websites most often appear on the homepage and About Us pages (e.g., letters, pictures or video) and share more information than just the executive's name.
- CEOs are using video to promote their company narratives. Growth in video is nearly evenly divided between CEOs appearing in videos on company websites and on corporate **YouTube** channels.
- Despite increased visibility online on websites and in videos, CEOs have barely budged in their use of social networks—from 16% in 2010 to 18% in 2012.
- U.S. CEOs are the most likely to be on social networks (40%) while European CEOs are the most likely to be on YouTube (38%). None of the respondents from either APAC or Latin America indicated that they have social network accounts.

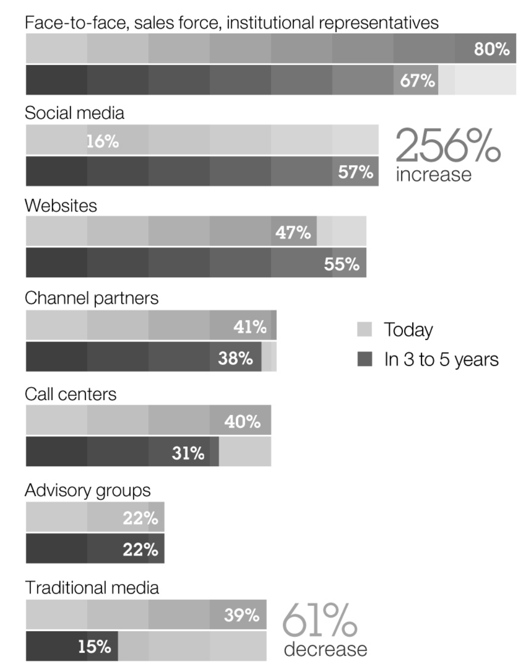
Source: Weber Shandwick

► Customers Look for Connection: The emotional aspect of customer service is getting increasing critical, as one in three global respondents preferred being treated well compared with having their issues immediately resolved, says a study by **AchieveGlobal**, a global workforce development company. The study reveals that the behaviors most irritating to customers stem from detached emotional awareness and connection—a situation detrimental to PR pros as well. Study highlights include:

- Almost half (46%) of global respondents note that being rude, short, nasty, unhelpful and impatient is the greatest customer service mistake that they have experienced. Using a canned script in dealing with issues (17%) and saying "no" or "I don't know" (16%) also rank among the top customer experience failures.
- A negative customer experience not only threatens a particular sale, but also the reputation of the brand. Given the rising power of social media as a tool for brand advocacy, nearly 40% of respondents worldwide admit to posting a negative review online after a poor customer experience.
- Half of respondents note that they would sample a competitor after one bad experience and 93% would defect after three or fewer poor customer service experiences. PRN

Source: AchieveGlobal

While Face-to-Face Interaction Rules with CEOs, Social Media Engagement is Expected to Explode



CEOs believe social media within five years will become one of the top two ways to engage customers, mainly at the expense of traditional media, according to IBM's 2012 CEO study.

Source: IBM

Tweets On a Plane: American Airlines Flies High with Masterful Response to Alec Baldwin's 'Words' Rant

Company: American Airlines
Agency: Weber Shandwick
Timeframe: Dec. 6-7, 2011

These days, hardly a plane leaves the tarmac without a passenger aboard tweeting a complaint about his or her seat, delayed departure, a screaming baby or a missed connection.

Several airlines now feature customer service hubs that monitor social media to lend a helping hand, including **American Airlines**. But when the complaint comes from a celebrity who has a bone to pick with the airline, the rule book gets tweaked, if not tossed aside altogether.

Such was the case on Dec. 6, 2011, when American Airlines crew members responded to an incident involving actor Alec Baldwin on a flight from Los Angeles to New York. According to witnesses, the incident began when Baldwin was asked by a flight attendant to turn off his mobile phone in preparation for takeoff, a clear FAA regulation.

At the time, Baldwin was playing the popular Scrabble-like game Words With Friends on his smartphone. After being asked to turn off his phone and refusing, the plane went back to the gate and Baldwin was removed from the flight, at which point he began tweeting to his then 600,000 followers.

Within a few minutes, 2,722 people had re-tweeted Baldwin's messages, which quickly spread among five million people. News outlets picked up the story shortly thereafter.

The American Airlines social media team, a combined group of the airline's customer service reps and PR pros from agency partner **Weber Shandwick**, convened immediately and developed a response plan that would:

1. Acknowledge Baldwin's experience and publicly offer to assist directly so as to avoid a confrontation, if possible.
2. Accurately tell the American Airlines side of the story, underscoring its emphasis on passenger safety and commitment to following FAA regulations about onboard mobile phone use.
3. Ensure that best practices were taken from the incident so as to enhance the carrier's existing social media issues management plan.

Alec Baldwin's Twitter exchange with American Airlines' crisis team drew thousands of retweets, eventually reaching five million-plus people.

Crisis Lessons: Between a 30 Rock and a Hard Place

Stephanie Scott

On December 6, 2011, **American Airlines** crew members responded immediately to an incident involving celebrity actor Alec Baldwin. Stephanie Scott, social media specialist for American Airlines, provides four lessons learned from handling the issue:

1. "With attentive listening and a digital defense strategy in place, AA social media was prepared to respond quickly," Scott says.
2. Whether it's a celebrity with hundreds of thousands of followers, or a mom using Twitter for the first time to get more information about her flight's status, American's social team must be responsive, quickly and courteously.
3. "Continuing to provide social customer service when all eyes were on @AmericanAir contributed to positive public perception," Scott says. After responding, other social media influencers chimed in and commended American for its transparency.
4. "'Fight social media fire with social media water.' AA shared its response in social, where Baldwin initiated the dispute," Scott says. Keeping the conversation where it started proved that American was digitally savvy and comfortable in this space.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Jonathan Pierce, American Airlines' director of social media communications, says that the airline is used to handling both high-profile customer issues and social media issues, but that this was the first time the two were combined.

"Baldwin's tweet didn't @mention or direct message us, it was a general mention of the American brand, so it took a few minutes for the team to be aware of it," Pierce says. The tweet was flagged by the airlines' customer service team in Los Angeles (which uses NetBase and TweetReach for monitoring Twitter). Baldwin's flight details were then pulled to understand where he was and what was happening on the flight. "We needed to get the color behind the scenario," Pierce says.

Here's the Twitter timeline:

5:01 p.m., Baldwin fired off: "Flight attendant on American reamed me out 4 playing WORDS W FRIENDS while we sat at the gate, not moving."

5:19 p.m., Baldwin tweeted: "#nowonderamericaairisbankrupt."

5:33 p.m., AA responded: "@AlecBaldwin Mr. Baldwin, we are looking into this. Please DM us contact information."

5:38 p.m., Baldwin wrote: "Now on the 3 o'clock American flight. The flight attendants already look... smarter."

5:50 p.m., Baldwin wrote:

“#theresalwaysunited Last flight w American. Where retired Catholic school gym teachers from the 1950s find jobs as flight attendants.”

Two subsequent tweets featured Baldwin’s pledge to fly **United Airlines**, as well as to make his Words with Friends name #theresalwaysunited.

Pierce says the airline’s crisis response was by the book. It aims for a 15-minute response time, 24/7, on Twitter, which was hit with two minutes to spare. But, with Baldwin, there was a lot more impact than just the tweet because of the reach of his followers.

“As his followers chimed in, our Twitter feed was drowned out by others commenting on the issue,” Pierce says.

THE STATEMENT

The next day, in drafting its official statement, the American Airlines PR team’s strategy was not to include names explicitly, as well as carefully detailing the way in which events unfolded onboard the aircraft; the tone was candid, and straightforward.

Seeking to capitalize on the fact that Baldwin began his tirade through social media, American Airlines on Dec. 7, 2011 posted its official statement first on Facebook.

The Facebook statement served as the company’s primary media communication. As calls from journalists were received throughout the day, reporters and bloggers were directed to American’s Facebook page, which ultimately generated up to 50 additional links back to the statement message.

Pierce says AA’s first priority is to help the person with the problem. As the day and situation evolved, the objective became to manage American’s flight attendants and the brand’s reputation, and get some clarity on the facts. “We didn’t want to cover personal accusations, so our response detailed what the FAA requirements were for electronic devices,” Pierce says.

The team also explained why the plane returned to the gate. If crew members are alarmed enough to believe there’s a security risk, it’s critical to share that with the public. “Once we shared those facts, we saw support for our actions and support for not bending for celebrity,” Pierce says.

CRISIS CHALLENGES

According to Pierce, when you’re in the middle of a crisis involving hundreds and hundreds of tweets, the most difficult thing is being able to step back and stick to your strategy.

If given a second chance at the situation, Pierce says the team would have had more conversations directly with the AA staff at LAX at the time of the incident.

“You have to speak to the people on the ground who can judge the mood and manage the face-to-face contact, which is a critical part of any crisis response—in addition to the social team sitting at a computer in a remote location,” Pierce says.

Photo courtesy of NBC

On Dec. 10, 2011, Alec Baldwin (with Seth Meyers) lampooned the American Airlines incident on “Saturday Night Live.”

SMOOTH LANDING

In total, the Facebook statement reached 75,729 people via 6,534 likes and 1,261 shares. A tweet posted with a link to the Facebook post was retweeted 355 times.

For its responsiveness, AA was praised by social influencers, who recognized that celebrity does not always equate to “carte blanche” in the face of an FAA guideline.

“From past experience, even a high-profile celebrity can tweet to 100,000+ followers and the response can be minimal, or we can see someone with 200-300 followers get a huge response,” says Brian Conway, account supervisor for Weber Shandwick. “It depends on the nature of the issue, if there’s a corresponding blog post, etc.”

And though Baldwin went on “Saturday Night Live” posing as the pilot of the flight that he was removed from and to issue an apology—to himself—Conway says that he, and his mobile device, are welcome on board again. PRN

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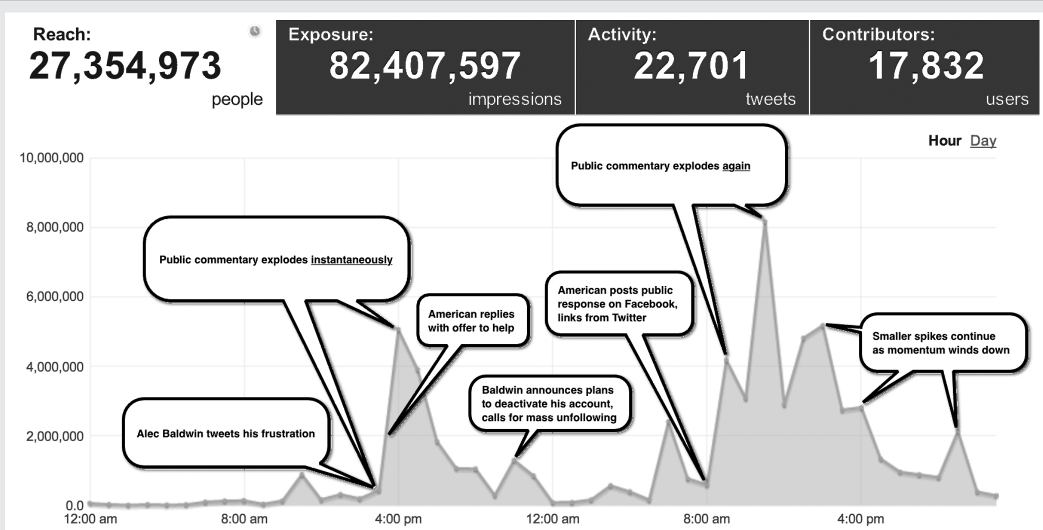
Twitter Turbulence: Baldwin Crisis Ebbs and Flows



As chronicled by PR agency Weber Shandwick’s social media monitoring tool, American Airlines’ dustup with actor Alec Baldwin had its peaks and valleys, ultimately reaching more than 27 million people.

Source: Weber Shandwick

Social-Media Policy Refresh

▸ *Page 1*

engaging in protected communications.

"Concerted communications" means two or more employees acting together in support of matters of mutual interest, such as compensation, benefits or workplace conditions. Such protected communications are part of Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

OFFLINE TO ONLINE

"This is really about social media becoming like every other form of communication," says Ephraim Cohen, executive VP, technology and digital content practice lead at **MWW**. Indeed, the NLRB is enforcing Section 7 online like it would if three people were overheard by management talking by the company's water cooler.

But why step in now? Ethan Wall, an Internet, intellectual property and social-media attorney with law firm **Richman Greer, P.A.**, says one case in 2010 seemed to irk the NLRB. It involved Dawn Marie Souza, who worked for a Connecticut ambulance service.

On her own Facebook page, Souza called her supervisor a "scumbag" and a "17," which is ambulance code for psychiatric patient. The company subsequently fired her.

The NLRB stepped in and filed an action to strike down what it called an overbroad social-media policy that restricted Souza's ability to communicate protected activity.

Eventually the company settled with Souza. That NLRB action on her behalf seemed to get the ball rolling. So now, it's imperative that existing social-media policies are closely examined, and new ones are carefully drafted.

So how do communicators working closely with HR and legal "NLRB-proof" their social-media policies? At the moment that's impossible, says Wall. "The NLRB has told us what is not appropriate, but so far it hasn't provided guidance as to what is appropriate," he says.

Even though the situation seems complex, Wall, who authors the Social Media Law & Order blog at richmangreer.com, offers a rather simple solution: follow your ABCs—Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity.

- **Accuracy:** The drafter of the policy needs to do her homework while consulting with legal counsel, compliance and HR.

  Language is important. For instance, a company may say in its policy, "Employees may only use social media for appropriate business communications." The word "appropriate" is not specific enough, and leaves the passage open to interpretation.

  Instead, the passage might read: "Employees may not post illegal, harassing or discriminatory messages via social media."
- **Brevity:** Lawyers make things as complicated as possible. As a result, a lawyer will draft a policy that will cover every nook and cranny.

  "Make policies as brief as possible, and tailored to specific types of platforms—Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, mobile devices, email, blog, etc." Wall says.
- **Clarity:** A social-media policy should be easy for employees to read from beginning to end; to know what is prohibited and what is not and how they should comply, Wall says. For even more clarity, make sure key terms (like Web 2.0, for example) are defined in a glossary.

While keeping the policy document simple is the goal, Cohen agrees that different policies for different platforms is best. Twitter or Facebook policies would cover posting text, images and video. With the launch of Twitter's Vine, video content on video-centric sites might be tackled in a separate policy.

MAKE THE DISTINCTION

Cohen stresses that PR guidelines for social media and social-media policies are not the same thing. "Legal policies tend to be more restrictive," he says. But that's not to say that PR policies shouldn't be reviewed by the legal team. "Because of the complexities, communications and legal must have a close relationship," he says. "We're smart but we're not lawyers."

To that end, Wall suggests building a social-media team with staff from PR, legal, compliance, advertising and marketing. "You'll be able to better identify new issues that arise and determine the next steps," Wall says.

And, PR execs can hope, keep the NLRB at bay. PRN

(Catch Ephraim Cohen presenting at PR News' *Digital PR Conference, Feb. 27 in San Francisco; prnewsonline.com/digitalsummitsanfran13/.)*

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Social-Media Policy Tips From Cisco's Social Manager

Autumn Truong

Autumn Truong, senior manager, social media at Cisco Systems, oversees social media for corporate communications. Here Truong offers some sage advice on how to create an effective social-media policy. For a look at Cisco's social-media policy and guidelines, go to: www.scribd.com/doc/33461366/Cisco-Social-Media-Policy-Guidelines-and-FAQs.

- Policies need to be updated constantly based on changes with each social network, and then communicated to employees.
- Companies need to determine the best approach for compliance—whether they should make it a requirement for employees to review and sign, acknowledging they've reviewed the social media policy.
- Each company's social-media policy is different—company values and culture have to be taken into account when creating rules and guidelines on how employees use social media to represent the company.
- Always include within the policy: online rules and offline rules for employees are exactly the same…e.g., if you can't do it offline as a part of your job, you shouldn't do it online.

AMEC's Valid Metrics Framework

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Reputation Building	Awareness	Knowledge	Interest	Support/ Preference	Action
Public Relations Activity	• Content creation • Traditional media engagement • Social media engagement • Influencer engagement • Stakeholder engagement • Events/speeches				
Intermediary Effect	• Audience reach [traditional & social media] • Impressions/Target audience impressions • Number of articles • Video views • Frequency • Prominence • Share of voice	• Key message alignment • Accuracy of facts	• Key message alignment • Frequency of (positive) mentions • Expressed opinions of interest • Social network Followers • Retweets/Shares/ Linkbacks	• Endorsement by journalists or influencers • Rankings on industry lists • Expressed opinions of support or preference • Social network Fans • Likes	
Target Audience Effect	• Unaided awareness • Aided awareness	• Knowledge of company profile and offer	• Relevance of company (to stakeholder) • Visitors to website • Click-thru to site • Time spent on site • Downloads from site • Calls • Event/meeting attendance	• Attitude change • Uplift in reputation drivers e.g. Trust, Admiration • Endorsement • Belief in corporate brand • Links to site • Enhanced relationships with key stakeholders	• **Sales** • **Market share** • **Share price** • **Talent retention and recruitment** • **Cost savings** • **Customer loyalty** • **Legislation/regulation passed or blocked**

When using AMEC's Valid Metrics Framework matrix, your goal is to move diagonally across the matrix, from top left to bottom right, ending with some solid "actions." (Download at amecorg.com.)

told; the story is disseminated via a third party/intermediary, (such as journalists, influencers or bloggers); and, the story is consumed by the target audience, which leads to changes in behavior and business results. These three phases are thus reflected in the Vertical Axis of each matrix as follows:

- **Public Relations Activity—** Metrics reflecting efforts in producing and disseminating messages.
- **Intermediary Effect—** Metrics reflecting third-party dissemination of messages to target audiences.
- **Target Audience Effect—** Metrics showing the target audience has received the messages and any resulting action-driven outcomes.

The horizontal axis then reflects what is commonly known as the Communications or Marketing Funnel with five stages: awareness, understanding, interest/consideration, support/preference and action.

Within each Matrix, suitable metrics have been grouped to help you demonstrate a campaign's success vertically (from simple activity to output and outcome results) and horizontally (through the five communications stages). The goal is to move diagonally across the matrix, from top left to bottom right.

It all boils down to your objectives and what you are trying to accomplish. Once you've defined all that, you simply follow the AMEC Valid Metrics Framework instructions:

1. Choose the grid that best fits your campaign.
2. For "Public Relations Activities" just count your efforts. For example, for "Content Created" you might count number of tweets, number of posts, number of videos, etc.
3. For "Intermediary Effect," review the matrix ideas and choose what works for you.

"Don't make yourself crazy by measuring too much. Choose a couple of solid metrics in the most important phases of your program that are affordable and manageable."
Angela Jeffrey
MeasurementMatch.com

For example, for Reputation good bets are key message alignment, endorsements, retweets/shares and linkbacks.

4. For "Target Audience Effect," review the matrix ideas and again, choose what works. If surveys are needed, online polls and DIY approaches are cost-effective, and website activity can be a great proxy.
5. Finally, for the "Action" box determine at least one business/organizational outcome that is relevant to management and feasible to track. Work with your client, or other internal departments, to get business data such as sales, survey scores and market share information.

Consider correlating your Intermediary Effects and Target Audience Effects to uncover the magic link.

Meanwhile, here are a few lessons learned from my experience with the matrices:

- Start by creating a blank matrix and plotting your current measurement measures to see where you are focused, and where you need to grow.
- Read "Guidelines for Setting Measurable Public Relations Objectives: An Update" from the IPR Measurement Commission and restate your objectives clearly.
- Don't make yourself crazy by measuring too much. Choose a couple of solid metrics in the most important phases of your program that are affordable and manageable.
- Finally, put your new measurement plan into another blank template and see if it shows progression toward the bottom right corner. If so, you are on your way. PRN

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BY AARON BLANK

Make the Agency/Client Bond a Strong One

In the dynamic world of public relations, PR agencies thrive from the successes of their clients. It is vital to remember that victories are shared experiences and both parties mutually benefit from wins. Developing an agency relationship is a commitment that both sides must own. The client has to give the time and effort to educate the agency while the agency has to give the time and effort to get up to speed about the client and its work.

Here are 10 ways to make the agency/client relationship a win/win:

1. Define what success looks like right away: From the gate, make sure you agree on specific goals that can be measured along the way. Have an honest conversation about your needs and work with your agency to define how you are going to get there—together.

2. Don't underestimate a check-in: Schedule weekly calls and reports so that both teams are on the same page. Over-communicate to make sure the relationship is developing in a healthy way. Keep updates on goals and measurable objectives, and be accessible so no one is left in the dark on the progress of a project. Ultimately, share as much information as possible to make sure all parties are maximizing their potential.

3. Think strategically and forward: Revisit goals often to see if progress has been made and evaluate the efficiency of methods in place. If you envision how things 'should be' more often, the more clarity you have to change the way things are done in the present.

4. Go outside the box: Do not be afraid to get creative on a project or try something new. Even if the other party is not on board initially with the risk-taking, it could spark another idea that influences the next project. In today's digital world, innovative ideas are what keep conversation going.

5. Don't spit out PR agencies: If you are hiring your fourth PR agency in just a few years, then either you do not understand what PR can do for you or you do not know how to leverage your PR firm's capabilities. Open up the conversation with the firm you hire, tell the powers that be what you expect and ask them how they can help deliver those results. For the agency, reconsider the client who has hired three shops prior to your engagement with it or help that client identify solutions that are win-win.

6. Beware of the bait and switch: It should be understood that you would present the team that will be working on the project. If you are interviewing a PR agency, ensure that you are meeting with the team that will actually be conducting the day-to-day work on your account. Ask your agency for the team that will be doing the work—and meet with them so that you know what you are getting from the start.

7. Share information: The more your PR agency knows about the day-to-day activities of an industry or business, the more likely it will be successful. Share as much information as you can with the client—do not hold back.

8. Understand a retainer fee structure versus an hourly rate: A retainer does not mean you will get unlimited hours from your PR agency. Do not expect it either. It simply means that you are purchasing a sum of hours from your account team to manage the work at hand. If you go over the budget allotment, an agency should be reporting to you and letting you know that you are about to exceed your monthly budget. This is how an agency makes its money. A $5,000 a month retainer is not the same as a $25,000 a month retainer—and agencies with good business models share this information with their clients.

9.Use your voice: Clients hire you for your perspective and counsel. Do not fear rocking the boat (or losing an account) by voicing your opinion on potentially contentious issues. Clients want strong counselors who can help them chart their course even during difficult times. On a separate note—it should go without saying—reputation is the bottom line in our industry. Protect both your client's, and your own, by doing the right thing at all times.

10. Have fun: As clients and agencies begin a long-term relationship, both teams need to ensure that they can work together. Like any relationship, this takes time and effort. A strong pair needs to establish trust, challenge each other and collaborate. Get to know each other as people, then learn how to leverage each other's skills to produce positive results. PRN

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