
The State of Data-Driven Communications Strategies

*Research Report from PR News in
partnership with PublicRelay*

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The State of Data-Driven Communications Strategies

Research Report from PR News in partnership with PublicRelay

by Steve Goldstein, editorial director, PR News

Digital communications makes nearly all actions and results quantifiable. This fact should enable communicators to have an easier time proving the value of their work. But if all actions lead to data, what does data lead to? Merely proving value isn't enough—not if senior leaders have a built-in bias about the business value of PR, beyond getting favorable coverage in the Wall Street Journal.

Communicators need to take the next step with their data. They need to turn communications data into something useful; they need to tie communications into larger business goals instead of using data to prove one's worth as a communicator.

Measurement and data analysis can expose the weaknesses in a communicator's strategy, and fear of exposure may lead some to weigh down senior leaders with a dizzying, confusing array of dashboard charts and tables.

Sometimes it's not fear but overzealousness that leads to a C-suite data dump.

"Sometimes we get so excited with data that we put everything in there," says Shilpa Mehta, principal analytical lead at Google. "Often, dashboards are not one-page affairs but rather 28-tab Excel files or 34-slide PowerPoint decks. Each tracks too many metrics, and rarely attempts to segment and highlight performance. The net result is that it is nearly impossible to distill a cogent understanding of what happened and what action should be taken now. Be a communicator, not a dump truck."

In either case—whether fear or passion is the motivation to amass and dump data—the end result is numbers, not business strategy.

Andrew Bowins, executive director, corporate reputation, KMPG, says we're living in the age of content pollution, which leads to overwhelming competition for your messages as well as masses of communications data. "Communicators need to evolve from being deli-counter providers of data reports to being a strategic partner and provider of insights to the enterprise. We need to get to the art and science of communication so we can produce communications strategy that transforms the organization."

To gain a better understanding of the day-to-day role of measurement and media analysis, PR News and PublicRelay, a media monitoring and analytics firm, surveyed in October-November 2017 selected communicators at the director level and, separately, at the VP level and above.

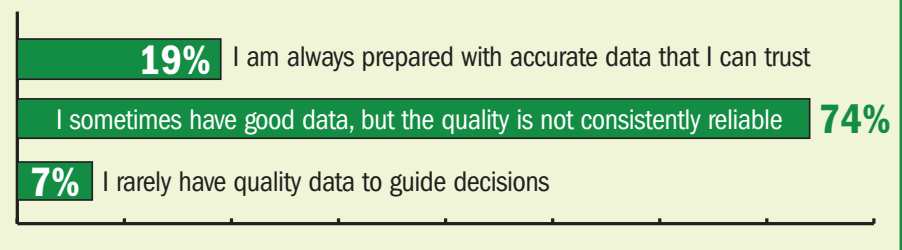
A Lack of Consistently Reliable Data

We learned that there is profound uncertainty about the uses of data and of the value of the communications data that communicators share with senior leaders. Nearly 75% of director-level communicators said, when asked how prepared they are with quality media analytics data to make decisions, that they "sometimes have good data, but the quality is not consistently reliable." Only 19% of director-level communicators said they are prepared with accurate data they can trust.

Similarly, 72% of VP-level and above communicators said they have good data only sometimes, but the quality is not consistently reliable. Only 25% of respondents in this group said they are always prepared with accurate data they can trust.

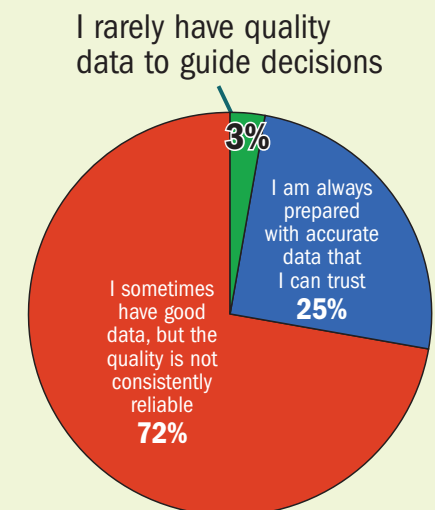
"With 75% of communications executives not getting data they can trust, the writing is on the wall: If you are going to defend your work to the CEO, you'd better invest in a solution that actually gives you reliable insight," says Eric Koefoot, CEO, PublicRelay.

How prepared are you with quality media analytics data to make decisions?



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, director level, November 2017

How prepared are you with data to make decisions?



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, VP level and higher, including C-suite titles, November 2017

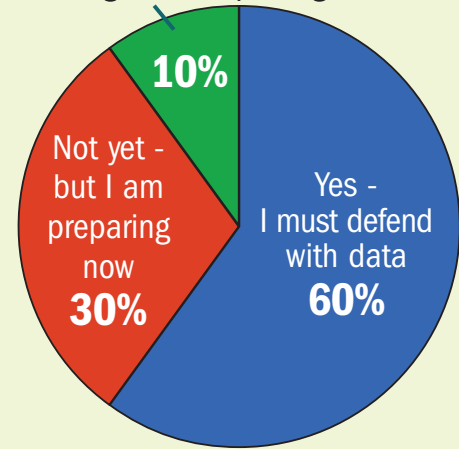
For VP-level and above communicators, that sense of a lack of reliable data is compounded by growing demands from CEOs and executive boards for more data-driven analysis. 60% of respondents said they are under increasing pressure from CEOs/executive boards to defend their work with data.

Speed of data collection and the cost of analytics are less important to respondents than the accuracy and insightfulness of data. Better accuracy and insight were ranked the most important changes they wanted to see in their media intelligence process, above speed, lower cost and comprehensiveness of media coverage. This was the case for both director-level and VP-level and above respondents.

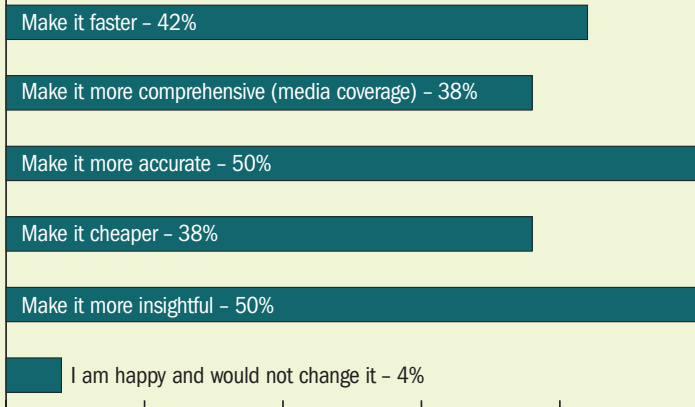
Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, VP level and higher, including C-suite titles, November 2017

Is your CEO/Executive Board asking for more data-driven analysis around measurement?

No - I have not changed our reporting



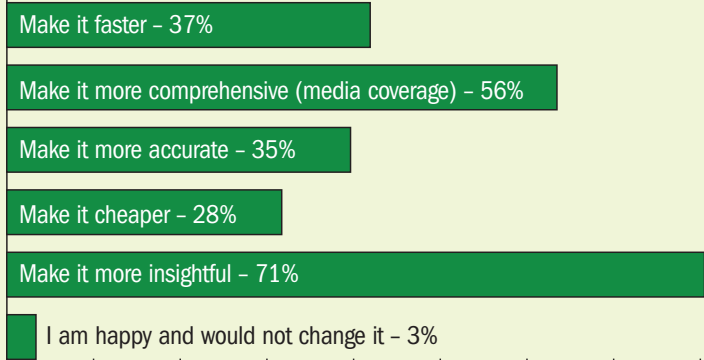
How would you change your media intelligence process to better meet your quality data needs? (Select all that apply)



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, director level, November 2017

Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, VP level and higher, including C-suite titles, November 2017

How would you change your media intelligence process to better meet your needs? (Select all that apply)



Understanding Media Analysis Data a Struggle for Director-Level Communicators

Nearly 40% of director-level communicators are finding it difficult to understand the media analysis data they're currently receiving, saying they spend a great deal of time cleaning up data, searching for insights and building their media analysis story. 56% of director-level communicators also reported that either PR agencies or outside media analytics firms are responsible for collecting the media data that drives their communications strategy. This leads us to two conclusions: directors of communications are spending too much time comprehending data and finding insights, and they're not getting enough value from the agencies and media analytics firms they hired to help them with this task.

“While these percentages seem high, this is a surprisingly common issue that we hear about—a dirty little secret of sorts,” says Koefoot. “Communicators simply want an accurate narrative to share that tells the story around what’s happening, where they need to focus effort and how they are meeting business goals. They need contextual answers, not more pretty charts and graphs that don’t help them build strategy.”

VP-level and above communicators are finding it easier to understand the media analysis data they're receiving. Roughly a quarter of respondents said it's easy for them to share data-centered stories and insights with their CEO or their board directly; 61% said it's “somewhat easy – we first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points” from their data.

Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, VP level and higher, including C-suite titles, November 2017

How easy is it to understand the media analysis you receive today?

15% | Very easy

- I can share the stories and insights with my CEO or the Board directly

48% | Somewhat easy

- We first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points

37% | Difficult

- We spend a great deal of time cleaning up data, searching for insights, and building our story

Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, director level, November 2017

How easy is it to understand the media analysis you receive today?

24% | Very easy

- I can share the stories and insights with my CEO or the Board directly

61% | Somewhat easy

- We first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points

15% | Difficult

- We spend a great deal of time cleaning up data, searching for insights, and building our story

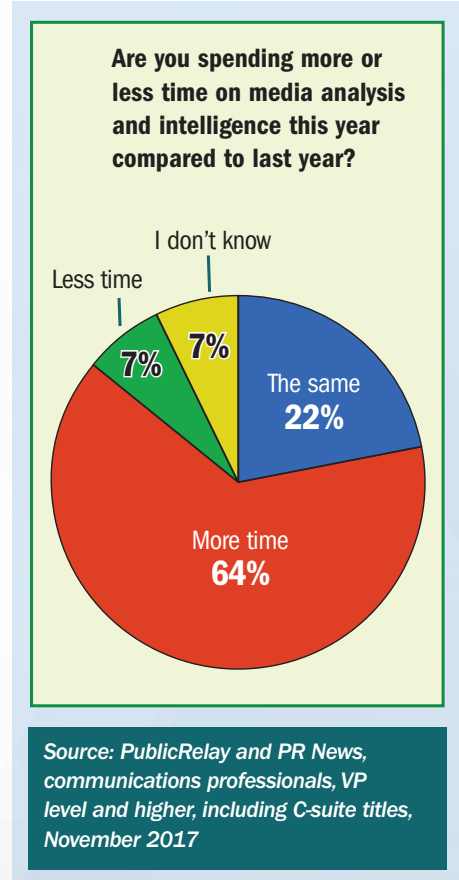
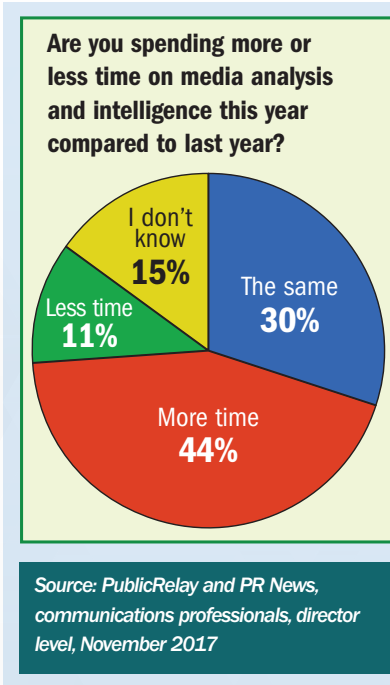
More Time Spent on Media Analysis, at the Expense of Time Spent Building Strategy

The proliferation of data has been a mixed blessing for communicators. Theoretically, access to communications data should provide business insights and align the

communications function more closely with overall business goals. The reality of working with data is more complex.

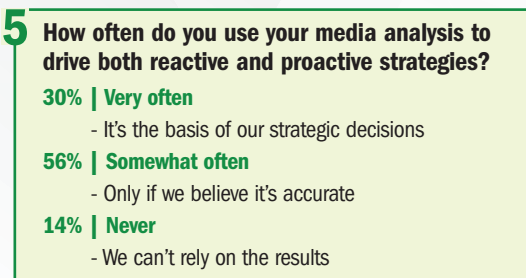
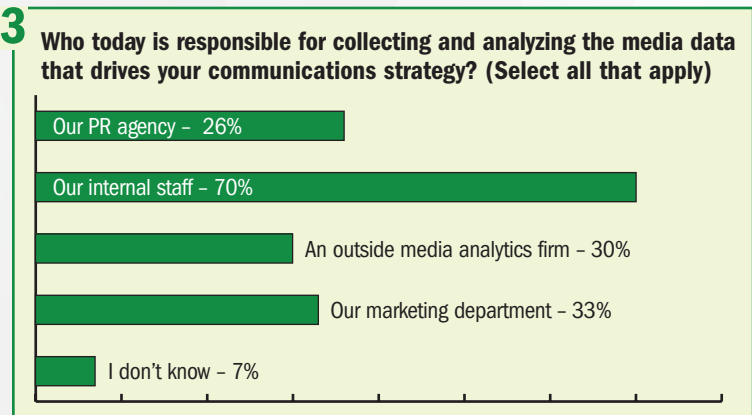
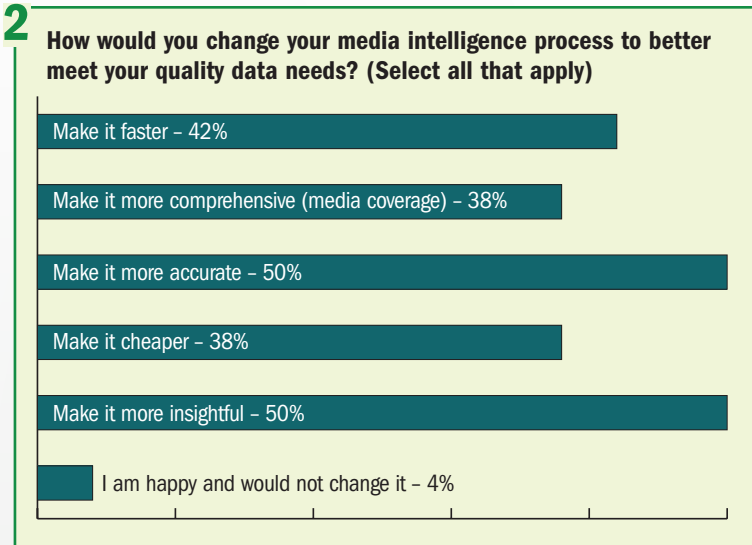
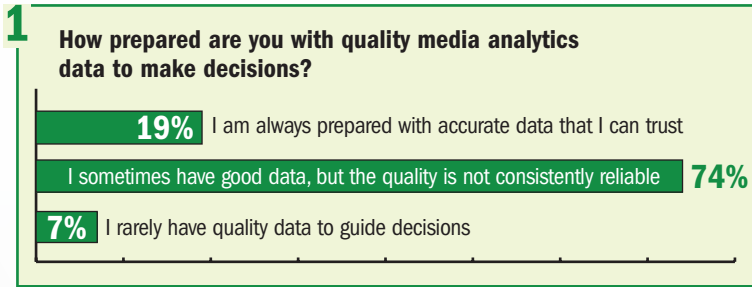
When asked if they are spending more or less time on media analysis and intelligence this year compared to last year, 44% of directors of communications and 64% of VP-level and above communicators said they are spending more time.

For director-level communicators, it's clear what's being sacrificed as they spend more time sifting through data for insights. When asked which communications activities they'd rather be doing than media analysis, 69% said they'd rather be building strategic messaging plans and 65% said they'd rather be spending time pitching or focusing on influencer outreach.



Please see the full results of the PR News/PublicRelay survey on the following pages.

PR News/PublicRelay Survey: Are You Building Data-Driven Communications Strategies? (director level)

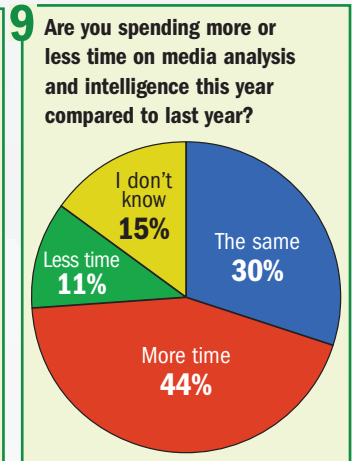
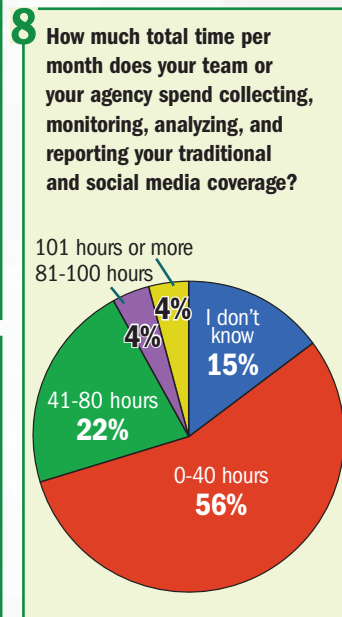


6 Please rank the following media analysis outputs by level of importance. (1 being high and 5 being low)

	1	2	3	4	5
Share of Voice versus that of competitors or peers	34%	19%	27%	8%	12%
Authors or outlets that are not writing about us but are covering our peers or competitors	20%	28%	20%	4%	28%
Uncovering industry influencers (pundits, academics, regulators, etc.)	28%	20%	36%	4%	12%
How my traditional media is being shared across social media	36%	24%	28%	0%	12%
Sentiment for my brand or reputation drivers (concepts - not keywords)	44%	28%	12%	4%	12%
Accurate intelligence that I can quickly share with my CEO or Board	40%	20%	16%	8%	16%

7 Please rank the following media analysis outputs by how you are executing these today. (1 being very well and 5 being poorly)

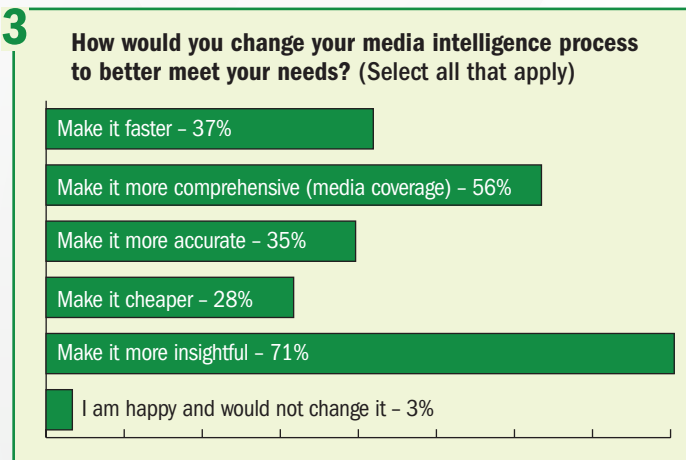
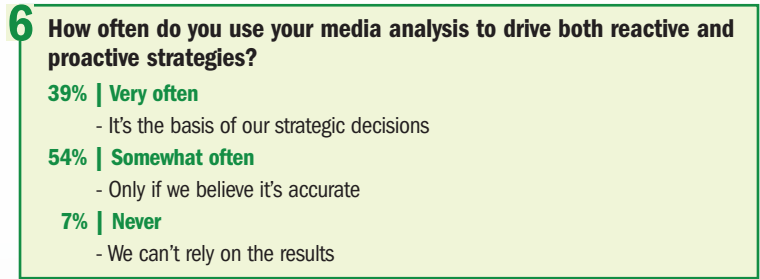
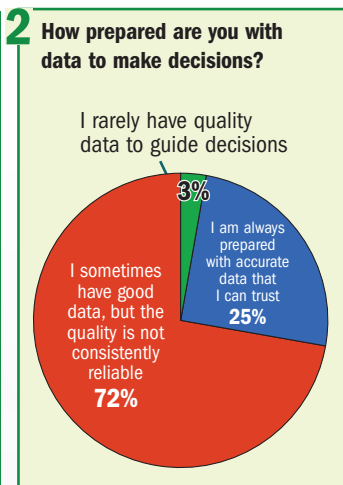
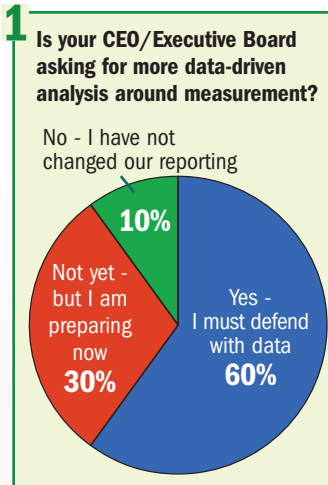
	1	2	3	4	5
Share of Voice versus that of competitors or peers	22%	26%	30%	11%	11%
Authors or outlets that are not writing about us but are covering our peers or competitors	7%	15%	44%	7%	26%
Uncovering industry influencers (pundits, academics, regulators, etc.)	11%	22%	37%	15%	15%
How my traditional media is being shared across social media	33%	14%	33%	11%	8%
Sentiment for my brand or reputation drivers (concepts - not keywords)	15%	42%	34%	4%	4%
Accurate intelligence that I can quickly share with my CEO or Board	23%	27%	31%	8%	12%



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, director level, November 2017

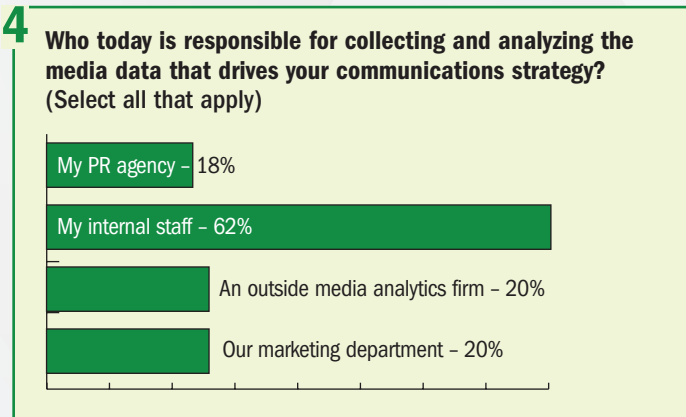


PR News/PublicRelay Survey: Are You Building Data-Driven Communications Strategies? (VP level and higher)



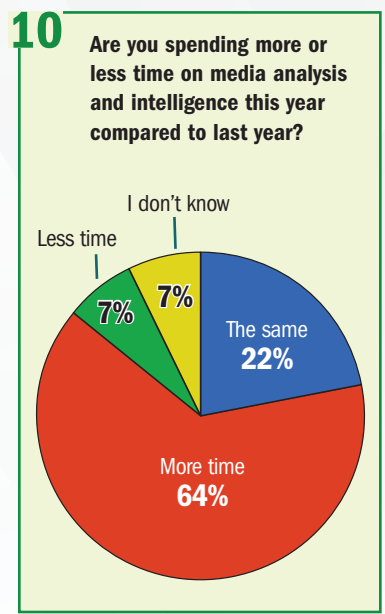
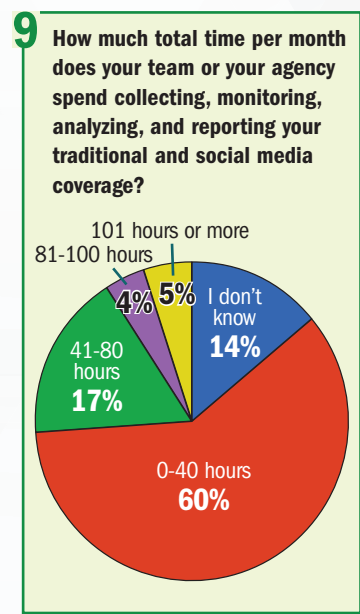
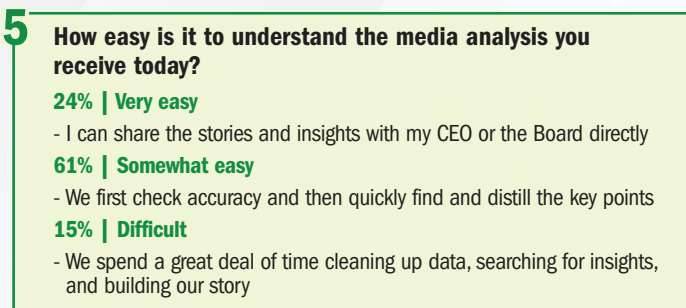
7 Please rank the following media analysis outputs by level of importance. (1 being high and 5 being low)

	1	2	3	4	5
Share of Voice versus that of competitors or peers	31%	25%	17%	14%	14%
Authors or outlets that are not writing about us but are covering our peers or competitors	19%	32%	22%	22%	5%
Uncovering industry influencers (pundits, academics, regulators, etc.)	33%	19%	23%	11%	14%
How my traditional media is being shared across social media	31%	27%	22%	22%	47%
Sentiment for my brand or reputation drivers (concepts - not keywords)	29%	34%	12%	15%	10%
Accurate intelligence that I can quickly share with my CEO or Board	39%	22%	20%	10%	8%



8 Please rank the following media analysis outputs by how you are executing these today. (1 being very well and 5 being poorly)

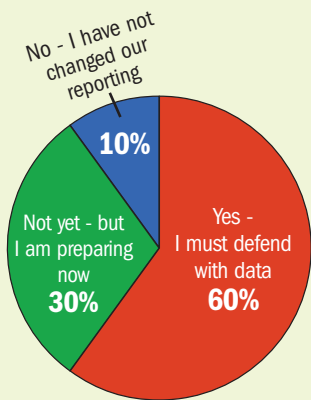
	1	2	3	4	5
Share of Voice versus that of competitors or peers	17%	32%	37%	5%	8%
Authors or outlets that are not writing about us but are covering our peers or competitors	12%	24%	32%	20%	12%
Uncovering industry influencers (pundits, academics, regulators, etc.)	15%	32%	25%	20%	7%
How my traditional media is being shared across social media	15%	38%	22%	17%	7%
Sentiment for my brand or reputation drivers (concepts - not keywords)	12%	19%	39%	24%	7%
Accurate intelligence that I can quickly share with my CEO or Board	16%	21%	42%	18%	4%



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, VP level and higher, including C-suite titles, November 2017

PR News/PublicRelay Survey: Are You Building Data-Driven Communications Strategies? (all results)

1 Is your CEO/Executive Board asking for more data-driven analysis around measurement?



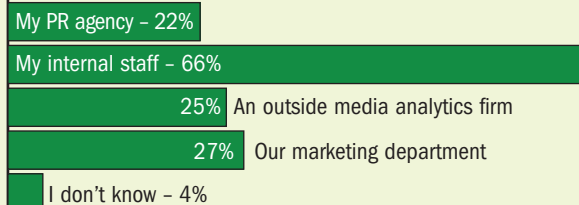
2 How prepared are you with data to make decisions?



3 How would you change your media intelligence process to better meet your needs? (Select all that apply)

- 40% | Make it faster
- 47% | Make it more comprehensive (media coverage)
- 43% | Make it more accurate
- 33% | Make it cheaper
- 61% | Make it more insightful
- 4% | I am happy and would not change it

4 Who today is responsible for collecting and analyzing the media data that drives your communications strategy? (Select all that apply)



5 How easy is it to understand the media analysis you receive today?

- 20% | **Very easy**
 - I can share the stories and insights with my CEO or the Board directly
- 55% | **Somewhat easy**
 - We first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points
- 25% | **Difficult**
 - We spend a great deal of time cleaning up data, searching for insights, and building our story

6 How often do you use your media analysis to drive both reactive and proactive strategies?

- 35% | **Very often**
 - It's the basis of our strategic decisions
- 55% | **Somewhat often**
 - Only if we believe it's accurate
- 10% | **Never**
 - We can't rely on the results

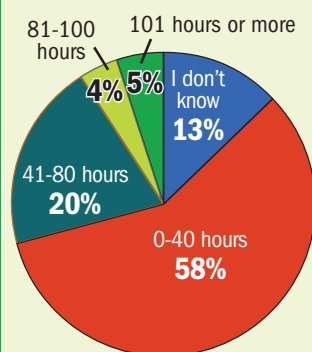
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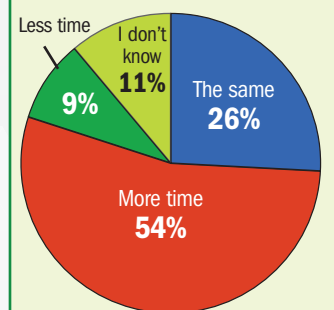
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Sentiment for my brand or reputation drivers (concepts - not keywords)	13%	31%	37%	14%	5%
Accurate intelligence that I can quickly share with my CEO or Board	19%	24%	37%	12%	8%

9 How much total time per month does your team or your agency spend collecting, monitoring, analyzing, and reporting your traditional and social media coverage?



10 Are you spending more or less time on media analysis and intelligence this year compared to last year?



Source: PublicRelay and PR News, communications professionals, director level and higher, November 2017

11 Which of the following communications activities would you rather be doing than media analysis? (Select all that apply)

- 8% | Nothing - I'm a data scientist
- 65% | Pitching or influencer outreach
- 38% | Executive media training
- 69% | Building strategic messaging plans
- 15% | Investor relations programs
- 12% | Crisis management
- 31% | Social media brand strategy
- 38% | Managing and pitching our spokespeople

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