

Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards



PR MEASUREMENT STANDARDS: DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PR PRACTITIONERS

The following is a list of practical do's and don'ts to help you put research and measurement standards to work for you, your colleagues or your clients. Also included throughout are links to helpful articles and additional information.

Standards (Uniform Consensus – Rules for PR Measurement)

DO

- Accurately and honestly communicate to your colleagues/clients the precise manner in which you plan to report on the results.
 - Share all [relevant definitions](#) (e.g. mentions, impressions, "top-tier") and methods before the campaign begins for each aspect of measurement.
 - Any changes/revisions to methods should be quickly communicated to the client, internal or external, and approved.
 - Have as part of your resource library recognized, third-party sources available for validation of any aspect of your measurement plan presented to your colleagues, clients. (Don Stacks and David Michaelson. *A Practitioner's Guide to Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation*. Second Edition. Available in April 2014).
 - Provide stakeholders with a report template so that everyone knows precisely what information you will be sharing.
 - Remember that standards are only the foundation. You can, and should, innovate, try out new metrics or develop proprietary metrics appropriate for your specific situation.
- Establish a baseline for measurement prior to a campaign, and track against the baseline.
 - The baseline can include any metric, such as survey metrics (e.g., awareness, purchase intent), media metrics, sales, new social media followers, likes, etc.
 - Establish a benchmark level for the agreed-upon metrics prior to the start of a campaign and then re-evaluate tracking metrics against the benchmark once the campaign is underway or after the campaign has completed.

DO NOT

- Use a term like ROI (Return on Investment) unless you are speaking of a [financial](#) measure where both the [money invested](#) (the "I" of ROI) and [money earned or saved](#) (the "R" of ROI) can be measured in financial terms. *ROI* should not be used when referring to results of non-financial measures. (Please see [here](#) for the standard, and [here](#) and [here](#) for discussion of approaches to demonstrating financial ROI).

- Claim a metric you are using is “standard for the industry” until you have ascertained that it is, indeed, a “standard.”
 - If you do use non-standard metrics, be clear about how you define or calculate the metrics.
- Claim that public relations results such as media hits or impressions are evidence of changes in the attitudes or behaviors of the target audiences.
- Allow stakeholders to interpret “impressions” to mean “the number of people who read/viewed/listened to an item.” (Please see [here](#) for more information).
 - An impression is an opportunity for interaction, not an interaction.
 - Ensure stakeholders are clear that the phrase “X article received 1,878,299 million impressions,” means “Approximately 1,878,299 people had the opportunity to read this article,” and not “X article was read by 1,878,299 people.”
- Use multipliers
 - Report the exact UVMs (Unique Visitors Monthly), circulations, viewership, etc. for the particular channel.
 - If you’d prefer a daily number for UVMs, as opposed to monthly, divide the UVMs by 30 and include a reference about why this was done.
 - There is no research to substantiate claims for multipliers (e.g. multiplying print circulation mentions by 2.5 because, on average, a print magazine is read by 2.5 people). These kinds of numbers have always been little more than a best guess. (Please see [here](#) for reference).
- Use AVE (Ad Value Equivalency)
 - Most advertising is uniformly positive and nearly always focused on the brand. PR, on the other hand, can be positive, negative, or neutral and could feature the brand prominently or only in passing. As such, any attempt to take an advertising cost metric and apply directly to PR will be grossly misleading and should be completely avoided. (Please see [here](#) and [here](#) for reference).
 - For a suite of media metrics linked to measurable objectives, please see [here](#).

Best Practices (Nearly Uniform Consensus, But Not Yet Elevated to a Rule)

DO

- Exercise caution with terms such “value.”
 - “Value” is an extremely important, albeit nebulous concept. If you intend to use “value” as a measure of your performance, be sure that you and your stakeholders have agreed on the definition of “value” before the start of the campaign and of the measurement program.

DO NOT

- Report only on extremely basic metrics, such as impressions or mentions.
 - Your stakeholders need to know how you've impacted the awareness, attitudes, opinions, perceptions, intentions, and behaviors of the target audiences, so try to show them.
 - Given the declining costs of high-quality survey research, it is possible to report on how a campaign affects the awareness, attitudes, and opinion metrics such as awareness, impact, purchase intent, etc. In most cases, these are infinitely more valuable to a client than impressions. (Please see [here](#) for the standards of the communications life cycle).
 - If possible, tie your campaign to actual business results, such as sales or employee engagement. Case studies for this are [here](#) and [here](#).
 - When reporting on quantitative media and social media metrics, such as impressions or mentions, include qualitative metrics as well, such as tone or prominence.

Recommended Approach (No Uniform Consensus Yet, But Most Agree)**DO NOT**

- Use PEO (Paid, Earned, Owned) instead of PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned).
 - We recognize that with the widespread use of social media, taking into account "shared" media is crucial.
 - However, it's best to use "shared" metrics as a way to evaluate Paid, Earned, and Owned channels rather than elevating "shared" to be on equal footing.
 - For example, once items are categorized as Paid, Earned or Owned, Shared metrics can be evaluated in each of the Paid, Earned or Owned categories.