



# Measuring Media Coverage Effectively

## Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this White Paper will be to:

- Briefly discuss the importance of PR measurement today;
- Primarily focus on “output” measurements for media relations;
- Outline the “pros” and “cons” of key measurement tools;
- Provide “gnitty gritty” how-to tips for the proper measurement of television, radio, newspaper and magazine coverage.

## So Why Measure?

We’ve all heard it. The number one challenge facing the PR industry today is the need for accountability. In fact, a study we sponsored in 2003 for PR News, “Attitudes Toward Public Relations Measurement & Evaluation” by Dr. David Michaelson, found that while 81% place “some or great value” on measurement, only one in five had any kind of budget for it. Those with measurement budgets report they average only 2.3-2.5% of their total PR budgets, which is far below the 10% recommended by PRSA, IABC and the IPR Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation. The biggest reason for not measuring is still “cost” (61%), with “uncertain how to measure” and “lack of standards” being next at 35% and 34% respectively. Finally, fully 84% still primarily rely on “press clippings” to tell their story, with only 42% of their budgets being allocated for the measurement of outcomes. (1)

The major PR professional associations, research firms and data vendors are now working hard to encourage practitioners to measure their results, with the primary focus being on measuring business “outcomes.” Outcomes-based measurement tells us whether or not a campaign has affected real change in an audience’s attitudes, awareness or behavior, which should impact an organization’s overall goals and objectives. The problem with measuring outcomes, however, is that it’s often difficult to isolate the effects of PR apart from other factors (advertising, marketing, distribution, etc.) to infer causality.

The questions we hear day-in and day-out are more rudimentary, and tend to center on the proper measurement of “outputs.” Output-based measurement gauges the short-term success of the PR tactics and efforts undertaken to effect outcomes, such as numbers of stories placed, audience impressions, tonality of stories, etc. The obvious problem with measuring outputs, however, is that they have been difficult to relate back to actual business outcomes.

Research conducted by PRtrak (now part of VMS) and other research firms suggest that a link DOES exist between outputs and outcomes that can be seen through proper measurement techniques. Thus, the purpose of this paper will be to provide some guidelines on how to measure PR outputs conservatively and efficaciously, so that you have the best chance of seeing these exciting correlations.





## A Quick Look at the Bigger Issues

### Measuring Against Objectives

No primer on output measurement can ignore the heart of the measurement issue today, which states that regardless the use of outcome or output metrics, all are meaningless unless compared against goals and objectives set at the beginning of a campaign. Moreover, communications goals must flow directly out of organizational goals to achieve lasting results.

The PRSA Accreditation Program (APR) provides excellent training on how to write PR campaigns that link directly with organizational goals, and how to measure before, during and after a campaign is finished. The APR primary textbook, *Effective Public Relations*, by Cutlip, Center and Broom can be ordered at [www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org). Finally, The Institute for Public Relations Commission on Measurement and Evaluation provides extensive training on these issues and more: [www.instituteforpr.com](http://www.instituteforpr.com).

### New Research: Outputs DO correlate to outcomes!

As stated above, the importance of measuring media-coverage outputs has only recently come to light. New data shows that such measurement, if done properly with precision data, and in comparison with competitive coverage, not only correlates, but can sometimes help predict, outcomes. For instance:

- CARMA, one of the industry's oldest communications measurement firms, has found that editorial coverage generally correlates with public opinion.
- IPR Commission on Measurement former Co-Chair Bruce Jeffries-Fox, in a major study comparing advertising and public relations at AT&T, found that news indeed impacts perceptions.
- PRtrak has found in more than 170 studies utilizing more than 10 million clips that Share of Discussion, which is defined as "the quantity and quality of your nonpaid media, versus those of your competitors," correlates directly with key business metrics such as sales and customer preference. (See white paper referenced below for case studies on these findings). (2)

The PRtrak studies have all shown the importance of competitive analysis when trying to ascertain correlations, though they can sometimes be seen when measuring only your own coverage with proper metrics. A particularly interesting case study by VMS in 2003 on five nonprofit colleges further defined which media metrics to use when figuring Share of Discussion, comparing net positive Story Counts, Audience Impressions and Media Values. The study utilized 3700 clips, and compared Parental Preference survey results for the five schools against their respective Shares of Discussion, and had an extremely high overall correlation of .90.

The study clearly illustrated that Media Value was the strongest of the three metrics ( $R=.99$ ) while Impressions were second ( $R=.88$ ) and Story Counts were third ( $R=.79$ ). However, it is important to note that to be useful, Media Value must be refined by tonality. In fact, VMS released a new metric called the Media Prominence Index in 2006, which refines Media Value by Slant and Prominence of client in story, and which looks to be the most accurate output metric developed to date.





## Pros / Cons of Various Output Tools

The following summarizes some of the most commonly used metrics for media coverage measurement from simplest to most complex. As you'll see, no one measure is adequate in itself. The IPR Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation advises us always to use a variety of methods for as well-rounded a picture as possible.

Tool	Pros	Cons
<p><b>Article Counts</b> Assesses numbers of placements or mentions.</p>	<p>Fast and relatively easy.</p>	<p>Provides no information about article size, slant, audience, messages, etc. A one-inch mention counts the same as a feature story.</p>
<p><b>Audience Impressions</b> Assesses potential reach of a story placement or activity; typically "circulation" or "readership" figures for print, "gross impressions" for broadcast; "daily average visitors" for internet, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If audited data from Arbitron, Nielsen, SRDS, SQAD, comScore MediaMetrix and other 3rd-party media research firms is used, the numbers do provide some base line against which to measure over time.</li> <li>• Widely used throughout all marketing and communications fields.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audited data has been expensive and difficult to find, but is becoming more available.</li> <li>• Target-audience data is less available.</li> <li>• Assumes all recipients actually received the medium, and read/heard/saw a particular story.</li> <li>• Doesn't differentiate between size of placements.</li> <li>• Can't account for the "credibility" or "image" of a medium.</li> <li>• Quantitative with little qualitative refinement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Content Analysis</b> Assesses message point conveyance, slant, prominence, story position, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes the overall meaning of the placement, and whether or not it carries forth the client's objectives.</li> <li>• Absolutely essential to developing strategy, messages, market response, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjective in nature; qualitative rather than quantitative.</li> <li>• Less readily understood by non-PR audiences.</li> <li>• Requires significant amounts of time.</li> </ul>





Tool	Pros	Cons
<p><b>Ad Value Equivalency (AVE)</b> Assesses the market value of the particular space or time occupied by a story placement, or a portion thereof.</p> <p>AVE is now being referred to "<b>MEDIA VALUE</b>," and used only as an index over time, but not as an impact score.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures story size, impressions, and the perceived image or credibility of a media outlet.</li> <li>• Reflects slant if negative and positive values are used.</li> <li>• Reflects prominence since higher rates tend to indicate more prominent placement.</li> <li>• A recognized metric in marketing and advertising.</li> <li>• Effective if used as an independent index measured over time or in comparison with competitors.</li> <li>• New term "Media Value" being adopted to decrease the comparison between advertising &amp; PR.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term, "Ad Value Equivalency" implies a direct comparison between ads and editorial in terms of impact, which is like comparing apples and oranges.</li> <li>• Measuring stories equally, regardless of slant and actual portion owned, provides false results.</li> <li>• Audited data with negotiated rates was hard to find in the past, so values used were often spurious.</li> <li>• Easy to use with grandiose claims of success.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Publicity Value &amp; Multiplier</b> Multiplies AVE by an arbitrary figure to account for the perceived third-party "credibility" of editorial over advertising.</p> <p>Note: PRtrak funded a study by Dr. David Michaelson and Dr. Don Stacks in 2004 to look into this issue. Preliminary results suggest a multiplier may not exist, but more work will be done.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wirthlin Worldwide's 1999 nationwide survey stated overall, 8 out of 10 respondents ranked "news more believable than advertising."</li> <li>• Used for decades, conservative multipliers can help practitioners who use AVE from undervaluing their work.</li> <li>• If used at all, the practice and value of the multiplier must be disclosed to management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Institute for PR Commission on Measurement strongly advises against this practice on the basis that news ISN'T always more believable than advertising due to the erosion of responsible journalism.</li> <li>• Rampant use of astronomical multipliers without industry consistency has caused PR to lose credibility with management.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact and Prominence Indices</b> Various proprietary indices that are comprised of quantitative and qualitative measures, distilling them into a single metric.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undoubtedly a more accurate way to measure coverage, since soft and hard measures are taken into consideration.</li> <li>• Can be developed by any practitioner using a combination of media value or impressions data, and factoring in content analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because they are proprietary, it's hard to know exactly how they've been calculated, and whether subjective factors are still too much at play.</li> </ul>





## Ethics: Taking the Road Less Traveled

So... how does one measure one's own work fairly and objectively? For example, if your company's name is mentioned in a minor way in a round-up story including many other sources, how much of the article should you count for credit?

Our advice, in a nutshell, is to err on the side of conservatism to gain management or client respect. It is usually preferable to hire an outside research or measurement firm that has no direct stake in the results to evaluate your coverage. However, budgets don't always allow for this, so we offer the following tips from years of experience.

- If you are the sole "source" in the story, and the story revolves around your issue or firm, you can count the entire story for credit.
- If you are one of several sources, you can either measure as much of the story as applies directly to you, or divide it up by the total number of sources.
- If you are mentioned once in a story that has very little to do with you, it's best to count only an inch or so on your report.
- If the story is negative, or if the portion attributed to you is negative, the Media Value should be a negative number, and subtracted from your report total.
- Always use audited impressions and Media Value numbers from respected third-party media research firms, such as Arbitron, Nielsen, SQAD, BurrellesLuce, VMS, SRDS, comScore MediaMetrix, etc. If numbers are not available for a given segment, they can be estimated by using numbers from similar publications or shows. BUT, be sure to DOCUMENT the fact that it was just an estimate with a footnote.
- Whenever possible, use NEGOTIATED rates for TV and Radio story placements, which are available from media buyers, station sales reps (ask for "planning numbers"), through SQAD ([www.squad.com](http://www.squad.com)), through PRtrak software ([www.vmsinfo.com](http://www.vmsinfo.com)), and through other software vendors that have licensed the PRtrak database (which contains the SQAD, Arbitron, Nielsen, etc.).
- Use OPEN rates for print, since this is what is used throughout the industry at present. At some point, it is hoped that negotiated rates will become available for print as well, since it is rare that any ad is bought as a "onetime" placement.

## The Nitty Gritty: Quantitative Media Analysis

Media measurement falls into two general categories: "quantitative" and "qualitative." Quantitative measures include source, story size or length, date, time of airing, color or b/w, audience impressions, media value, publicity value, and more.

### Newspaper Measurement

Newspaper articles are measured by the "Standard Advertising Unit (SAU)" or "Column Inch."

1. Word-count-conversion: if you receive your clips electronically, it may be easier for you to measure by word-count. At VMS PRtrak, we use 25 words = 1 column inch for newspapers. Skip to #6 below.





2. If your clips are paper-based, obtain an SAU ruler from your local newspaper, or use a regular ruler and mark-off the following SAU Columns:

- 1 SAU Column = 2 1/16"
- 2 SAU Columns = 4 1/4"
- 3 SAU Columns = 6 7/16"
- 4 SAU Columns = 8 5/8"
- 5 SAU Columns = 10 13/16"
- 6 SAU Columns = 13"

3. To measure the **WIDTH** of a story, lay your SAU ruler horizontally across, and count the number of SAU columns (round-off fractions to half-columns). Don't worry about how many "text columns" the story appears to cover! Sometimes a story is set in wider or narrower columns than the SAU measurements. You just want the number of SAU columns (which standardizes all newspaper stories).

4. To measure the **LENGTH** of a story, lay the ruler vertically, and count the **REGULAR** inches.

5. Then, multiply the two numbers. For example, a story covering three SAU columns across, and 10 **REAL** inches down, would be 30 Column Inches.

6. To calculate media value, simply multiply Column Inches by the "open column inch, black & white" advertising rate for that publication.

7. To account for color graphics or photos, measure just as you did story text. Multiply total Column Inches by the B/W rate, and then **ADD the one-time COLOR fee** on top of that! For example, if a paper's "open B/W rate" is \$35 per-column-inch, and the story is 30 inches, the media value would be \$1,050. If the story includes full color art, and the cost for color in that paper is \$300 extra, the media value would be \$1,350.

8. For **REACH**, use the audited circulation of the publication. Alternatively, some practitioners use "readership" instead of circulation. It's best to use a newspaper's established readership number that has been researched. However, some practitioners use "average readership multipliers" on circulation as an estimated readership. Current industry average readership multipliers are:

- a. Daily Newspapers – 2.181 Readers Per Copy
- b. Sunday Newspapers – 2.314 Readers Per Copy
- c. Weekly Newspapers – 2.5 Readers per Household

Sources: MRI; SRDS; American Newspaper Publishers; Newspaper Association of America; The Readership Institute

## Magazine Measurement

Magazine ads are almost always sold modularly in sizes such as "full page," "half page," "quarter page," etc., and by whether the ad is black & white, 2-color, 3-color or 4-color. **NOTE:** For newspapers, you "added on" the color rate after figuring the b/w rate. For magazines, the color rates are usually given as single costs for the whole ad.

When doing publicity reports, most practitioners prefer to lump newspapers and magazines into a category called "print publicity," using a "total column inch" measurement rather than dealing with the myriad ad and page sizes that populate the magazine world.

Converting magazine coverage to Column Inches makes the physical measurement of clippings much faster and more accurate. But, you will therefore need to convert the magazine ad rates into SAU costs. Fortunately, this is easier than it sounds!





1. For paper-based clips, measure (or estimate) the “live matter” page size of the publication vertically and horizontally using REGULAR inches. Multiply the numbers together.
2. Divide the total by ONE AVERAGE SAU COLUMN WIDTH (2.1667”).
3. The result is the Total SAU Column Inches on that magazine’s full page.
4. Then obtain the full-page B/W or Color rates for the publication.
5. Divide those by the TOTAL SAU Inches for that publication page.
6. The result is your SAU Column Inch cost. For example, a standard magazine page is 7 x 10 regular inches.  $7 \times 10 = 70$  regular inches on the page. Divide 70 by 2.1667 (average SAU Column width), and you get 32.31 SAU Columns on the page. If the full-page ad rate is \$1000, divide this by 32.31 and you have your Per Column Inch rate, which is \$30.95.
7. For media value, measure your magazine story the same way you would a newspaper story with your SAU ruler, and multiply the total column inches by the new SAU cost. Or, use a word-count conversion for Magazine: 25 words = 1 column inch
8. For REACH, use the audited circulation figure of the magazine, or pursue the readership figure. Industry readership multipliers currently average:
  - Major Magazines - 5 Readers Per Copy
  - Specialty Magazines - 2 Readers Per Copy

Sources: Magazine Publishers Association

## Radio Measurement

Radio spots are usually priced in 60-second increments, and vary by time of day, day of week, and season of year. DayParts are defined as follows:

- 5 a.m. - 6 a.m.
- 6 a.m. - 10 a.m.
- 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- 3 p.m. - 7 p.m.
- 7 p.m. - 12 a.m.
- 12 a.m. - 5 a.m.

1. To calculate media value for a radio story, determine story duration in minutes and seconds. (Alternately, use a word-count conversion of: 177 words = 1 minute).
2. Divide by 60-second increments.
3. Multiply the number of 60-increments (including fractions) by the spot cost for that time segment. For example, if a spot airing at 7 a.m. on a weekday costs \$140 per minute, a 2.5 minute story aired at that same time would cost \$350 ( $\$140 \times 2.5$ ).
4. Audience Gross Impression estimates are researched and established by [Arbitron Inc.](#) for almost all time periods and by various demographic groups. You might choose to use an “18-plus” age bracket, or a more specific “Women 25-54” figure, depending upon your objectives.





5. Spot costs and audience impressions can sometimes be obtained through station ad reps, through your advertising agency or department, or now through several PR data providers.

NOTE: it is highly recommended that you obtain “negotiated” spot costs (or “planning numbers”) instead of “ratecard” rates, since no one buys only one radio spot. The industry standard for benchmarked negotiated spot costs is SQAD Inc.

## Television Measurement

Television spots are sold in 30-second increments, and are also priced by time of day, day of week, and season of year. To calculate media value and audience estimates, use the same methods employed for Radio, but use :30 second increments instead of :60. (Word-count conversion for TV: 75 words = 30 seconds.)

Spot costs and audience impressions can sometimes be obtained through station ad reps, through your advertising agency or department, or now through a few PR data providers. As with radio, it is best to always use “negotiated” or “planning” rates.

*For example, if a 45-second story aired during the 10:00 p.m. news, and a 30-second spot during that time period costs \$2,000, the story would be worth \$3,000 (1.5 x \$2,000).*

## Internet News Publication Measurement

This new media area has no simple “how to’s” established yet for uniform measurement of editorial coverage, but PRtrak created a first-ever Internet Database of output metrics for the Top 30,000 sites with the assistance of the CMR Taylor Nelson Sofres, SQAD Inc. and comScore MediaMetrix in 2002 that is now becoming something of a standard. We offer the following as a starting point:

1. Contact the website and obtain:
  - Daily Average Visits. (If they only have Average Monthly Visits, simply divide that by 30). (Ex: 20,000)
  - The 460x68 standard banner CPM ad rate. (Ex: \$25/CPM)
2. Divide Daily Average Visits by 1,000. (Ex: 20,000 visits divided by 1,000 = 20)
3. Multiply the CPM banner rate (Ex: \$25) by the amount above (20) to obtain the full cost of the banner (Ex: \$500)
4. Use the PRtrak conversion of 50 editorial words = banner cost (Ex. \$500)
5. Thus, if you had a 200-word story, the math would be: 4 x \$500 = \$2,000

## The Nitty Gritty: Quantitative Media Analysis

A PR professional should establish his “qualitative” output metric goals before a campaign begins, and with the agreement of his client, management or board of directors. Metrics will be determined by the overall objectives of the campaign, including the key messages to be conveyed, desired tone, targeted audience, story position or prominence goals, and more.

A simple rating scale of 1-2-3 or 1-9 can be established to rate, for example:

- Story Slant (1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive)
- Percentage of Message-Points included (1 = none, 2 = half, 3 = all)
- Specific Message-Point inclusion (1 = not present, 2 = somewhat there; 3 = major focus)
- Targeted Media (1 = least important; 2 = important; and 3 = most important media)





- Story Position (1 = poor; 2 = fair to good; 3 = excellent)
- Prominence of Mention (1 = just mentioned or part of round-up story; 2 = moderately featured, perhaps in top part of story, or on top of page; 3 = very prominent, such as in the headline or graphic).
- Target Audience (1 = off target; 2 = reasonably targeted; 3 = bull's-eye hit!)

An off-the-shelf spreadsheet program, or specific media-analysis software from a variety of PR vendors, can be used to make these calculations, with percentages of success illustrated in charts or graphs. Most importantly, the results should be compared back to the objectives of the campaign to see if goals for each measurement were indeed met.

## Conclusion

PR practitioners have seen an explosion in new developments and technologies for measuring outputs and outcomes, and prices continue to fall as a result. PR associations continue to host seminars and publish articles instructing practitioners on how to measure efficaciously. There is almost no excuse, now, for even the most budget-pressed to ignore the call to accountability! We at VMS hope this paper is a further encouragement to get after it! For more information about media measurement, industry-standard data, or PRtrak media-evaluation software, contact [sales@vmsinfo.com](mailto:sales@vmsinfo.com) or call 800-516-1297 or go to [www.vmsinfo.com](http://www.vmsinfo.com).

## Bio

Angela Jeffrey, APR, is a 20+ year veteran of public relations, advertising and marketing. She holds four national awards – two Silver Anvils from the Public Relations Society of America, and two Gold Quills from the International Association of Business Communicators. Angela was recently elected to serve as a member of the IPR Commission on PR Measurement & Evaluation. Throughout the nineties, Angela co-owned Jeffrey Communications, a Houston-based PR firm; previous experience included work with major national agencies and the JCPenney Company.

In 1997, after finding nothing affordable in the PR industry to streamline publicity evaluation and reporting, Angela and partners co-founded TRAKWare, Inc., and developed PRtrak, the nation's first affordable, in-house solution to publicity evaluation for both broadcast and print media coverage, and including content analysis capabilities. In January of 2002, TRAKWare, Inc. was acquired by Surveillance Data, Inc. (SDI) of Philadelphia, PA, and in September of 2005, it was acquired by VMS. Angela works intensely on new research linking PR outputs with business outcomes, called "Share of Discussion." Toward the goal of making this new measure as accurate as possible, she helped develop the Media Prominence Index, which enables practitioners to utilize a single metric to capture both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of media coverage. This MPI has tightened correlations between media outputs and business outcomes dramatically.

## Footnotes

(1) *Attitudes Toward Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation*. Clients and agencies agree that measurement is more important than ever, but only one in five budget for it. This PRtrak-sponsored survey by David Michaelson, Ph.D. and executed by QuickSilver Interactive of Dallas, was conducted for PR News in the Fall of 2003. <http://www.prtrak.com/MichaelsonPRNewsSurvey.doc>

(2) *Close Correlations* – summary of SDI Share of Discussion study on five northeast colleges, and which compared Media Value with Audience Impressions and Story Counts, by Angela Jeffrey, APR. [www.brainshark.com/survdata/CloseCorrelations](http://www.brainshark.com/survdata/CloseCorrelations)

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