

Putting PR Measurement and Evaluation Into Historical Perspective

by

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Background**

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Walter K. Lindenmann, Ph.D., is an independent consultant, specializing in public relations research, measurement and evaluation services. He recently retired from Ketchum, the international public relations counseling firm, after creating its Research and Measurement Department and serving for 12 years as the company's Senior Vice President/Director of Research. Prior to that, he spent two years as manager of the New York City office of Opinion Research Corporation and 10 years as president of Group Attitudes Corporation, the research subsidiary of Hill and Knowlton, Inc.

During his career, he has supervised the conducting of more than 1,500 public relations, public affairs, marketing, and advertising research projects, most of them for large corporations, financial service organizations, trade associations, government agencies, utilities, education and health groups and charitable organizations. He also has had an extensive amount of experience in designing and carrying out research projects aimed at measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of public relations programs and activities. In 1999, he served as the first chairman of the Institute for Public Relations' newly created Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation.

A sociologist with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Dr. Lindenmann has lectured extensively and has conducted seminars and/or workshops on public relations research, measurement and evaluation not only in the United States, but also in Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Italy, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Singapore, and Spain.

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There has been a good deal of attention in recent years on how important it is to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of public relations programs and activities.

Dozens of articles, booklets and reports have been published and distributed giving advice and counsel on how PR practitioners might more effectively build research, measurement and evaluation tools and techniques into their work.

All of these articles and booklets are welcome, since any steps that are taken by any group at all to call attention to the need to be accountable for the work we do in public relations have to be applauded.

As we focus on these new materials that are being distributed in the field, it is important, I feel, to put this entire area of public relations measurement and evaluation into proper historical perspective. It seems that some in our industry are almost assuming that up until the mid to late 1990s little of any significance pertaining to PR measurement and evaluation had taken place. That is not at all true.

It needs to be noted that interest in and serious attention to PR measurement and evaluation is a subject that has been widely discussed and carried out going back more than 60 years in time. During that period of time

- Many PR evaluation studies have been designed and carried out.
- Numerous sophisticated systems have been developed, and implemented, for clipping and measuring media coverage.
- Most PR practitioners and researchers have come to recognize that there is NO one, simplistic all-purpose tool that can be used to measure PR effectiveness -- that a variety of data collection tools and techniques are needed.
- And, a set of minimum standards and criteria for how to measure and evaluate PR effectiveness has already been developed and has been widely distributed.

Here are some facts:

- Academicians -- especially those social scientists specializing in mass communications techniques and theory -- carried out numerous studies and prepared scholarly papers on measuring communications effectiveness as early as **the 1940s and 1950s**. One of the seminal papers, clearly relevant to those interested in measuring public relations impact, was the classic article, "Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail," by Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley," (*Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 11, 1947, pgs. 413-423.) Other pioneering articles on communications effectiveness were written in those years by such noted academicians as Raymond A. Bauer ... W. Phillips Davison ... Carl I. Hovland ... Joseph T. Klapper ... Paul Lazarsfeld ... Wilbur Schramm ... and Charles R. Wright.
- Public relations professionals became attuned to the importance of measuring and evaluating public relations effectiveness as early as the **1950s**, when academicians such as Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center covered the topic in depth in the first edition of their highly respected textbook, *Effective Public Relations*, published in 1952.
- Although most public relations practitioners were paying only lip service to the notion of measuring PR impact, one of the first serious looks at the topic from a commercial or business perspective was the publication **in 1968** by

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- the American Management Association in New York of a 30-page booklet entitled, *Measuring and Evaluating Public Relations Activities*, that included seven articles on how to measure PR results, including one by John T. Cunningham, entitled, "Measuring Public Relations Results," and a second by Carl Ruff, entitled, "Measurement of Publicity Effectiveness by Inquiry Analysis." (Copies of the booklet are still available by contacting the offices of the American Management Association in New York City.)
- The first ever conference on measuring public relations effectiveness was held **in October, 1977** on the campus of the University of Maryland. The conference was initiated and sponsored by AT&T, which at that time was under tremendous pressure from those state public utilities commissions that regulated the telephone industry to justify its public relations and advertising expenditures. About 125 academicians, researchers, counselors and practitioners representing some of the largest corporations, trade associations, non-profit organizations, and public relations and advertising agencies in the country attended. James F. Tirone, who at that time was Public Relations-Director- Research for AT&T and Dr. James E. Grunig, professor of journalism and public relations at the University of Maryland, cohosted the conference.
 - At that meeting, Tirone for the first time revealed how his company, in concert with PR Data Systems, had developed a computerized program for measuring and evaluating media coverage. He also described numerous other methodologies that the Bell System was carrying out to measure and evaluate PR administrative processes ... employee publications ... community relations activities ... and educational relations activities.
 - Twelve background papers relating to PR measurement and evaluation were presented at that initial meeting. They all were published in a special issue of the *Public Relations Review* **in the Winter of 1977**, entitled "Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Relations."
 - Also in the **Fall of 1977**, Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann -- then a researcher at Hill and Knowlton, Inc. -- designed and carried out that company's first ever evaluation project to measure the effectiveness of a PR program that had been implemented by the American Iron and Steel Institute.
 - **In 1979**, Lindenmann developed a media measurement system at Hill and Knowlton, Inc. and carried out several publicity tracking research projects for the American Trucking Associations and for the Edison Electric Institute. That same year, Hill and Knowlton developed and began using with its clients a special research matrix for PR planning (in which facts and opinions are gathered to assist in developing and shaping possible communications programs or information campaigns) ... for PR monitoring (in which data are collected and assessed to track what is happening as a communications program gets underway, thus allowing for any necessary mid-course corrections or changes to be made) ... and for PR evaluation (in which an impartial and objective assessment is made -- in as scientifically precise and valid a way as possible -- to measure the effects or outcomes of the communications effort.)
 - **In November, 1982**, *The New York Times* ran a major article under the headline, "Measuring the Impact of Publicity," that quoted Paul H. Alvarez, then chairman of Ketchum Public Relations, that described that PR agency's technique for measuring publicity effectiveness and publicity value through its newly-developed *Ketchum Publicity Tracking Model*.

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- An article that described how to use content analysis techniques to measure PR publicity, "Content Analysis," written by Walter K. Lindenmann, appeared in the **July, 1983** issue of the *Public Relations Journal*.
- In the **Fall of 1983**, the *Public Relations Quarterly* prepared a special issue on "Evaluation Research in Public Relations" that included seven articles which summarized how those in the academic community and in the commercial sector were designing and carrying out PR measurement and evaluation projects.
- **In 1984**, a new company was formed in Washington, D.C. – it later came to be known as CARMA International -- that began specializing in the computerized measurement of publicity effectiveness.
- In the **Summer of 1984**, the *Public Relations Review* devoted an entire issue to "Measuring Public Relations Impact." The issue contained nine articles, by both academicians and practitioners explaining how public opinion polls, how focus groups, and how readership studies could be used to measure PR effectiveness.
- By the mid **1980s**, numerous articles on measuring public relations or publicity effectiveness began appearing in PR academic and trade journals, including articles by Glen M. Broom, Carolyn Cline, David M. Dozier, James E. Grunig, Harvey K. Jacobson, Lloyd Kirban, Philip Lesley, Douglas Ann Newsom, James K. Strenski, and Donald K. Wright.
- In **November, 1987**, *Marketing News* carried an article by Katharine D. Paine entitled, "There *Is* A Method For Measuring PR," that described a publicity measurement system she had developed while at Lotus Development Corporation, which she was at that time starting to use as part of the services she offered in a newly developed firm that she had formed, called the Delahaye Group.
- In the **Summer of 1990**, the *Public Relations Review* devoted another entire issue to PR evaluation. Six articles were published that described various tools and techniques for PR measurement.
- In **October, 1993**, the U.S.-based Institute for Public Relations Research and Education released a seminal study that had been carried out by Walter G. Barlow of Research Strategies Corporation in Princeton, N.J., entitled: "Establishing Public Relations Objectives and Assessing Public Relations Results." The study -- based on depth interviews with 16 academicians and 31 senior corporate practitioners -- described various tools and techniques that were being utilized throughout the industry, to plan for and eventually measure PR effectiveness.
- In **November, 1994**, the International Public Relations Association published and distributed a 40-page booklet in its Gold Paper series, entitled, *Public Relations Evaluation: Professional Accountability*. The booklet was primarily the work of Jim Pritchitt, an Australian public relations practitioner, and was funded by CARMA International.
- In **August, 1995**, *Public Relations Tactics* published an article, "Monitoring Publicity On The Internet," written by Katharine D. Paine, that explained how one might measure the effectiveness of announcements and promotional materials that appear on-line, adding a new dimension to the available literature on PR measurement and evaluation.
- In **March, 1996**, the German association of public relations counseling firms -- Gesellschaft Public Relations Agenturen (GPRÄ) - - held a special workshop that was attended by about 50 primarily European-based PR academicians,

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counselors and practitioners in a suburb of Frankfurt, that focused on how to measure and evaluate public relations effectiveness. The proceedings were eventually published in a 195-page book entitled, "Evaluation von Public Relations: Dokumentation einer Fachtagung."

- In **October, 1996**, what was described as a "Summit Meeting" on public relations measurement and evaluation was held in the U.S. Co-sponsored by the Institute for Public Relations (at that time, known as the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education) ... by the publication, *Inside PR* ... and by Ketchum Public Relations, the New York City meeting was attended by two dozen U.S. PR academicians, counselors, practitioners and research suppliers, and devoted a considerable amount of time and attention to more effectively establishing the "boundaries" of what constitutes appropriate measurement and evaluation in the field.
- In **November, 1996**, a somewhat similar "Summit Meeting" on public relations measurement and evaluation -- this one dubbed as an "international conference" -- was held in a suburb of Frankfurt, Germany. This particular meeting, which was attended by about 50 PR academicians, counselors, research suppliers and practitioners from around the world, was cosponsored by the International Committee of Public Relations Consultancies Associations (ICO) and by the Germany-based Gesellschaft Public Relations Agenturen (GPRA). As a result of that meeting, a number of task forces were created to examine public relations measurement objectives and techniques in more detail.
- Toward the **end of 1996**, the Swedish Public Relations Association published a 64-page booklet entitled, *Return on Communications*, that summarized the results of an extensive project that involved primarily Swedish-based academicians and practitioners and sought to put public relations evaluation into overall perspective. The booklet was principally the work of Hans V.A. Johnsson of Sound Communications in Old Greenwich, CT.
- In **June, 1997**, the U.S.-based Institute for Public Relations, published a 23-page booklet entitled, *Guidelines and Standards for Measuring and Evaluating PR Effectiveness*. The work of a task force consisting of 14 academicians, counselors, research suppliers and practitioners, this document -- primarily written by Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann -- was believed to be the first industry-wide guidebook that sought to establish minimum criteria for measuring PR effectiveness. Close to 10,000 copies of the booklet were acquired by PR practitioners in the U.S. The booklet was updated and revised in **2003** under a new title, *Guidelines and Standards for Measuring the Effectiveness of PR Programs and Activities* and can be downloaded from the Institute for Public Relations website (www.instituteforpr.org).
- In **September, 1997**, the London-based International Committee of Public Relations Consultancies Associations (ICO) published and began distributing copies of a 50-page booklet entitled, *How To Get Real Value From Public Relations: A Client Guide To Designing Measurable Communications Objectives*. Several thousand copies of the booklet have been sold and distributed both in Europe and in the U.S.
- In **September, 1997**, ICO -- in cooperation with the London-based Association of Media Evaluation Companies (AMEC) -- published and began distributing a second booklet, entitled *The Power of the Media and How to Measure It: A Client Guide to Media Evaluation*. Several thousand copies of

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that booklet also have been sold and distributed both in Europe and in the U.S.

- In the **Spring of 1998**, a comprehensive review of all of the materials that had been published and distributed going back dozens of years in time was prepared by Dr. Linda Childers Hon, an assistant professor of public relations at the University of Florida, and published as an article, "Demonstrating Effectiveness in Public Relations," that appeared in the *Journal of Public Relations Research*.
- In **January, 1999**, the U.S.-based Institute for Public Relations, which had been examining various aspects of the public relations measurement and evaluation process for more than two years through several different task forces, announced the formation of a permanent U.S. Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation. The aim of the new Commission was to become "the inclusive, authoritative arbiter of accepted standards for research and measurement relating specifically to public relations, as well as for research and measurement in related communications disciplines that may apply, or be linked in some way, to public relations programs and activities.
- In **February, 1999**, the newly-formed U.S. Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation held its first meeting at the University of Florida in Gainesville. The Commission included representatives of the following four industry segments: corporations and the non-profit sector (AT&T ... Bell South ... the Council on Foundations ... General Motors ... ITT Industries ... and Texas Instruments) ... research suppliers (Delahaye ... MediaLink ... Research Strategies ... Yankelovich) ... PR agencies (Golin/Harris ... Jackson, Jackson & Wagner ... Ketchum ... Porter Novelli) ... and academia (Glen Broom, San Diego State ... James E. Grunig, University of Maryland ... Linda Hon, University of Florida ... Donald K. Wright, University of South Alabama.)
- In **May, 1999**, a consortium of British organizations -- the Londonbased *PR Week*, the Public Relations Consultants Association, and the British-based Institute of Public Relations -- published a 100- page resource book, "*The Public Relations Research and Evaluation Toolkit: How To Measure The Effectiveness of PR.*"
- Also in **May, 1999**, the U.S.-based IPR Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation published a supplement to its 1997 *Guidelines and Standards* booklet. The supplement was entitled, "*Guidelines For Setting Measurable Public Relations Objectives.*"
- By the start of the **21st Century**, the U.S.-based IPR Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation had greatly expanded its list of background papers and resource tools. Included among the many papers that can now be downloaded from its website (www.instituteforpr.org) are these: *Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations ... Selling Public Relations Research Internally ... Toward An Understanding of How News Coverage and Advertising Impact Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavior ... A Primer on Internet Audience Measurement ... Measuring Success: Both Externally and Internally ... How To Measure Your Results In A Crisis ... Bibliography of PR Measurement*. The Commission also has developed an easy-to follow *PR Measurement Tree*, which can be downloaded from the website and used as a training tool when it comes to better understanding appropriate PR measurement and evaluation methodologies and techniques.

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This is only a partial summary of some of the major events that have taken place or articles and booklets that have been published during the past 60 years. There are literally hundreds of citations pertaining to PR measurement and evaluation that now appear in the public relations literature.

What is important to keep in mind is that measurement and evaluation in the public relations field is *not* a brand new issue or topic that has suddenly emerged just in the past few years. It is an issue and topic that has been widely discussed, actually carried out, and grown and evolved over a 60-year period of time.

It would seem to me that for those of us in the public relations field, it is high time that we stop shouting over and over again, "let's do something about evaluating PR effectiveness" or "let's invent the one simple tool that has never been invented before" to measure and evaluate PR effectiveness.

New ideas and thoughts relating to this sub-specialty are, of course, always welcome and appreciated -- and needed. But the time has come to stop "reinventing the wheel," to take a serious look at what already exists and has already been accomplished, and build from there.

From my perspective, the biggest problem in the PR field is NOT that adequate PR measurement and evaluation tools and techniques do not exist and that they need to be invented. There are many different methodological tools and techniques available that are already being utilized in the field.

In my view, the three major issues that we, in the public relations field need to address pertaining to PR measurement and evaluation are these:

- 1. We need to more effectively train public relations practitioners and counselors on how to measure and evaluate public relations effectiveness.*
- 2. We need to do a better job of building public relations measurement and evaluation components into our various ongoing communications programs and activities.*
- 3. We need to do a better job of convincing senior management of the importance of allocating appropriation funds to support PR evaluation efforts.*