Measuring PR Impact:
the Framework for a Data-Driven Strategy
Introduction

Today’s marketers are leveraging technology and data to drive decision making: demand gen, marketing communications, and other disciplines can strongly demonstrate their value with metrics that summarize tangible bottom-line impact on the business. That hasn’t been true for PR. In PR, we’re still tied to legacy metrics that are more about counting mentions and ‘clips’ than about measuring business impact.

What percentage of your PR decisions are made using data?

When searching for PR metrics, there are a lot of generic articles, generic speak, and more of the intangible PR is notorious for. This is the opposite of those kinds of conversations. Just like a blueprint translates a vision into the hard work of building a house, the Communicator’s Funnel is a framework that closes the gap between airy theory and practical action. We’re going to dive head first into real, actionable metrics, and the data behind them, that you can use when justifying your PR budget, spend, and decision making.

By the end of this eBook, you will answer the above question with a completely new perspective, because you’ll be connecting theory with practice through the use of data. We’ll be honest - some of that would be easier if you used the TrendKite platform to pull it all together. But whether you’re a customer of ours or not, the metrics we recommend are available to you if you’re willing to do a little work.
Before we dive into metrics, data, and where to get all of this information, we have to organize our thoughts based on a new way of looking at PR. The old ways of organizing, thinking about, and reporting on PR are just that, OLD. Stop pointing to lists of articles as success. Dive deeper.

Let’s look at the PR terms you know and use everyday in a different way, based on analytics and data because there is actionable data behind every article, journalist, and publication.

The biggest struggle in a more data-driven PR strategy is organizing all this new information, which is second to making sure you are tracking the right metrics in the first place. And to effectively track and measure impact, you need a detailed framework. Marketers use a marketing funnel or Buyer’s Journey model to understand what their objectives and key metrics are at each stage. We can apply a similar model - the Communicator’s Funnel - to PR and communications.
Brand Impact

Defined, brand impact is the impact on how your brand is perceived in the marketplace, in the minds of your potential customers, and the general public. Once people become aware of and favorably disposed to your brand, they’re more likely to engage with you.

But measuring a campaign’s impact on your brand has been elusive. If you are Disneyland, it’s hard to say that a new campaign had positive impact.

You are already the ‘happiest place on earth’, so how do you get campaign specific, ensuring that your efforts can be tied to real results?

We’ve broken down Brand Impact into 3 categories: awareness, mindshare, and reputation. Now, let’s break each down into real, actionable metrics.
In theory, awareness is simple. Are people aware of your brand? Has your target market heard of you? Are they mentioning your product at conferences or in market specific articles? Focus groups and surveys may measure awareness through aided and unaided recall of your brand, but in the PR world there are more effective ways to measure whether you’re getting in front of your audience.

Before you can do anything with a brand, you have to know how aware the market is. If you aren’t already quantifying awareness, you need to start; you have to create a baseline. But how?

How do you measure awareness? In its most simplistic form, the number of mentions serves as a proxy for awareness, because it captures the voice your PR work is creating in the market. As you record and graph this number, you can capture the volume of your signal. This is where a strong baseline has to be established. Even if this is a new metric, start building the numbers now. In three to six months, you’ll be able to show a chart of concrete numbers to which you can tie success by showing an up-and-to-the-right trend.

Or not. As we discuss each of these metrics, there is a possibility things are not going the direction you want (but that’s why you’re reading this book, to better your strategy), so don’t be intimidated by less than stellar numbers. You have to understand strengths AND weaknesses.
You may already be beyond the first steps with awareness. The most green PR pros start their day with a strong Google Alert review. But not all mentions are created equal, so you can’t stop with Google Alerts. Next, you’ll look at the publications: what’s their readership, do they hit your target demographic, geography, or industry audience. You’ll look at the articles, too - what’s the sentiment, is your audience engaging with them, and other measures of article impact. This gives you a data-driven take on awareness. But don’t just stop at mentions, or you aren’t getting the full picture.

Prior to using TrendKite, one of our fortune 500 customers tallied success by mentions; that’s it. They had no idea which articles were impactful, positive/negative, or even being read by their target market. And a laundry list of articles became something their bosses just glazed over, keeping their PR team from getting any real recognition of success. As they saw other areas of the marketing department reporting on tangible numbers, tied to real business results, they realized they needed stronger analytics or they would continue to see their budget, and team, shrink.

So, they reorganized their metrics, started pulling in incredible amounts of data, and began reporting brand awareness in a way that garnered more attention and respect. That’s the purpose of a data driven framework.

TOOL: Google Alerts is always a good start. It’s free, it’s relatively easy to use, and you can customize it from so many angles.
MINDSHARE

For Mindshare, you need to find trends in your mentions and featured mentions. (A featured mention, in plain English, is a mention in an article that is specifically about your company or product, rather than a passing mention in an article that may be about another topic.) You can also evaluate share of voice versus competitors by counting their total or featured mentions versus yours, and benchmark against the companies in your industry or other industries that you might want to emulate. It’s worth looking at this over time, rather than just in a snapshot, because the trendline can show if you’re gaining or losing, and the impact of specific programs that you run.

In practice, mindshare, measured by standard media mention reporting, includes: article publish date, publication name, author, link to publication, article title, topic/trend, publisher domain. For a clear picture of mindshare, you need to record every mention during your given reporting time period.

Trend/Topic - To take mindshare a level deeper, assign a topic or theme to each media mention. Common examples include: product launch, funding announcement, charity, industry topic, etc. Why is this important to your strategy? 

Researching and recording data based on trends will help you spot patterns in coverage so you can adjust your strategy to fit any upwards coverage trends. Also, use this in your competitive analysis...why did your competitor get a huge bump last week? If you know, you can then adjust your week to combat (or drown) their share of voice.

TOOL: You can use Google News to find relevant media mentions. You will have to do some manual filtering as Google News is less effective than a purpose-built tool at separating quality mentions from the noise, but the information will be there.
REPUTATION

You have to track whether your coverage is resonating with your target audience.

This is another great use case for social amplification, since social sharing is a good proxy for audience engagement, looking at sentiment and key message pull-through, as well.

After all, if you’re getting a strong signal with lots of coverage but the sentiment is poor or they’re not talking about the messages you’re trying to deliver, you’re not achieving your goals. Those three elements, illustrated by the right metrics, give you a data-driven read on reputation. Comparisons of specific event coverage like product launches or crises against your total brand coverage can give you a quantitative metric for the impact to reputation. Benchmarking those events against historical brand events and those of other companies gives you a way of talking about the “seriousness” or success of an event or can give you hints into where in the lifecycle of a crisis you are.

Sentiment measured by social amplification: as a result of the impact social media has on the spread of news, most publications include social share icons on every article. This, in turn, tends to include the number of shares across each platform. Though time consuming, it’s important to record these numbers. Go to each article you’re tracking and include the shares from each social network in your reporting spreadsheet. (There’s more; we dive deeper into social amplification on page 14.)

TOOL: If the article does not show the social share data, use a site like ShareTally to determine the shares of each article.
Measuring digital impact answers the question, “Is my PR coverage driving traffic to my website or other digital properties, and if so, what action are those visitors taking?”

PR professionals are becoming more familiar with digital measurement, but it’s safe to say that they’re not as comfortable with it yet as, for example, demand gen professionals. It requires a different set of tools and a substantially different mindset. This mindset shift is worth pursuing, as digital marketing has set the standard for modern marketing - everything becomes measurable, quantified, and optimized. In order to thrive in today’s digital environment, PR has to make a similar shift.

To make digital measurement meaningful, break it down into the right components. You’ll want to understand how many visitors you’re driving, are the links you’re creating of value, and is your content resonating with your site visitors. Website traffic, SEO impact, and social amplification are a way to break those objectives down for digital impact metrics.
TRAFFIC

In order to measure digital impact, start with tracking how many visits PR drives to the website. But it’s not enough to just watch spikes in traffic. To understand PR’s impact, you must map against your overall site traffic and understand what percentage of total web traffic you’re driving over time.

Getting a visitor to the site is the first step, but you also need to understand whether they engage or “bounce” (exit the site within seconds). Engagement is best measured by understanding your visitors’ behavior: how long do they spend on the site, how many pages does each visitor consume, what’s their bounce rate, and what content draws and keeps their attention. By understanding that, you better understand the value of the traffic, because you can differentiate between articles that drive one-hit wonders and articles that drive visitors who engage in a positive way with your site, and therefore your brand.

Ask someone with access to your company’s Google Analytics account to export the data or for the credentials to log in and generate the reports you need. GA isn’t the most intuitive tool, but it will give you a strong picture of web traffic, and you can build reports based on your PR metrics and goals. Every CMO understands the high value of a new site visitor, and the high cost of gaining that visitor through paid search or other traffic-building programs. You can use this data to show the real ROI of your PR in terms of website visitors, leads generated (B2B) or items purchased (eCommerce).

High value actions - Did the person interacting with your site complete a key form? Download info on the product? Or, if B2C, did they add something to a shopping cart? Tracking these high value actions from your PR efforts is key to your reporting.
SEO IMPACT

SEO (search engine optimization) is all about getting found when people search in Google or other search engines. PR can be a big SEO asset - but some publications have a high level of SEO impact and others don’t. For SEO impact, start by looking at the Domain Authority of your referring domains to help assess whether they’re helping increase your rankings for desirable search terms. This is important because not all links are created equal. A single link from a high-traffic, highly-regarded website can have a big impact on where you rank in search engines - and, consequently, an impact on how easy it is to find your content. Links from lower-traffic, less-important sites still improve your search rankings, but to a lower degree.

Quick note: while most links are helpful, Google considers some links from low-authority publications to be ‘toxic links’. If you know that, you can disavow those links so they don’t undercut the valuable SEO contribution PR can provide.

SEO Impact is a loaded metric, so let’s break it down even more, diving into Domain Authority and backlinks.

Domain Authority

Domain Authority, developed by Moz, is a score (on a 100-point scale) that predicts how well a website will rank on search engines. A well-established publication with quality traffic, informative content, and strong audience interaction will have high Domain Authority. So, as an SEO-savvy PR pro, when you’re evaluating and placing content, you’ll start to target publications with high Domain Authority.

This adds a dimension to the research you already do when planning pitch strategy. You start by researching the top publications and journalists in your market. Which publications have the strongest Domain Authority? What journalists have the highest impact?
There are different ways to measure a publication’s Domain Authority. Uncover content and link building opportunities, track your site’s link profile over time and compare to competitors for intelligent, targeted link building using free tools from Moz.

With this information, you can focus your PR efforts on the publications and journalists that are going to create the greatest [positive] impact to your brand, i.e. drive more traffic, bringing more quality eyes, warm leads that are easier to close.

**Backlinks**

One of your primary goals as a PR pro should be to land backlinks in your PR coverage, because ultimately you want an engaged reader to visit your website to learn more about your brand.

If industry influencers or high-readership publications are talking about you and linking to your website, then Google deems you more credible. Additionally, if you’re frequently linked to on social media or influential blogs, Google sees that as organic interest in your brand, which has a positive impact on your company’s search engine ranking. Google specifically gives priority in search to companies with the greatest number of relevant backlinks, and PR is one of the best sources for generating strong backlinks from relevant sources.

But not all links are created equal. You will want to categorize each link by the following: mention (good), mention with a backlink (better), and a backlink with anchor text (best).

Consider each type of link in terms of a restaurant recommendation. You’ve asked your friends where you should take a date. In evaluating the answers, you’ll consider how credible each of your friends is on the topic. This is kind of like Domain Authority, as it evaluates how trustworthy a recommendation is based on who the recommender is.

But you’ll also consider how complete and helpful each answer is: do they give you all the information you need to take action? This gives us an analogy for links, and helps us understand the difference between mentions (good), backlinks (better), and backlinks with anchor text (the best possible outcome).

**TOOLS:** Check out Moz Open Site Explorer and the Mozbar to get a stronger picture of Domain Authority and the information you need to record in tracking your PR impact.
Backlinks 101

**Good**
Your company’s name is mentioned in a story, but not hyperlinked.
“I like Second Bar and Kitchen.”

**Better**
Your company’s name is mentioned in a story. It is hyperlinked so that readers who click on the name go directly to your website.
“I like Second Bar and Kitchen at 200 Congress.”

**Best**
A search term (product, service, or idea that you want to rank for) is mentioned in a story. It is hyperlinked so that readers who click on that search term go directly to your website.
“I like the Seared Faroe Island Salmon at Second Bar and Kitchen.”

**TOOL:** Use **SEMRush** to quickly find all backlinks that are pointing to your site and the quality of those backlinks. Google search console is a good, free option; it just doesn’t provide as much information.
SOCIAL AMPLIFICATION

The third element of Digital Impact is social amplification, measuring how readers are extending your digital footprint across social outposts like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and more. By using metrics like shares and likes by platform, top articles with engagement, you can break social amplification into its component parts so you understand what is driving impact and where to focus your efforts.

Most publications have social icons next to the articles they publish that allow you to share the article and also record the number of times it has been shared. Go to each article on your list and record the social shares from each social network in your reporting spreadsheet.

If you’re not using a PR analytics platform, it will take some time to build up enough data so that you can see trends. But the exercise will give you great insights. Do this for a number of articles, and you’ll start to get a sense for which coverage resonates with your readers, and which coverage they ignore. Coverage that is socially amplified tends to be coverage that connects with your audience on an emotional level, or coverage that they find so useful that they just have to share it.

**TOOL:** If the article does not show the social share data, use a site like ShareTally to determine the shares of each article.
PR measurement has typically focused on only the top third of the Communicator’s Funnel, covering Brand Impact. But more PR teams are beginning to measure and report on Digital Impact. The end game, though, is measuring Bottom-line Impact. How many sales did PR drive for an ecommerce retailer? How many donations to a non-profit started with PR activity? How much business was created or influenced by PR?

**INFLUENCED PIPELINE (Hubspot, Marketo, Pardot, etc)**

Without a PR analytics platform this metric requires a bit of work, but it’s worth it. Think of pipeline as all the the business that, in a perfect world, you could close. These are potential customers who are aware of you and who are engaged in shopping activity or, for B2B, in an active sales cycle.

If this sounds like a hard number to get to - it probably isn’t. You have colleagues on the demand generation or marketing team who use systems like Hubspot, Marketo, Pardot, or Eloqua. (Or, if you’re a marketer at a smaller company, you may use these systems yourself.) Engage with that team and learn how they measure pipeline activity. When a new prospect enters the sales pipeline, the marketing team tags the prospect with a lead source or campaign. By adding PR as a campaign or lead source, you’ll soon be able to run reports showing which prospects were influenced by PR activities. Spoiler alert: it’s almost certainly more prospects than you (or your CMO and CFO) might suspect.
CONVERSIONS (Google Analytics)

There’s more to digital marketing than just getting visitors to the site or getting them into the sales pipeline. At some point you need to close some business. Google Analytics makes it possible to report on this by tagging ‘high value activities’ or ‘conversions’.

You can think of a conversion as a “change in status.” When you browse on Amazon, you’re a prospect. When you click ‘Add to Cart’ and make a purchase, you have changed (or been “converted”) into a customer.

When you dive into your marketing team’s goals, you’ll find that they monitor a number of high-value activities as conversions. It may be downloads of sales collateral, or online purchases, or donations, or sign-ups to a list. Those are all measurable conversions. Use Google Analytics to understand both how many conversions you’ve had in a given time period (“we had 2,017 prospects download this eBook and convert into eBook readers”) and conversion rate (“of our total site traffic, 2.3% downloaded this eBook and converted into eBook readers”).

REVENUE (Google Analytics)

For years, PR professionals have relied on questionable metrics to prove actual financial impact. Metrics like ad value equivalency look respectable on the surface, but when digging below the surface, you may find that the numbers are hard to tie to actual sales, bookings, and revenue.

Web analytics tools like Google Analytics make this easier. Think about the high value activities that we measure as goal conversions. A good marketer will have an idea of the value of each of those activities. An online retailer will know how much an average shopper spends per transaction. A B2B marketer will know the cost, and value, of an additional opt-in to the list or an additional download of content (like this eBook) based on how often those visitors convert to customers. A non-profit executive will know the average value of an additional donor.

In each case, if the value per conversion is known, the total revenue number can be calculated through simple math. Google Analytics makes this easier by calculating the value right in the console, based on the dollar value assigned to each goal. A PR analytics platform can make it even easier by pulling that value right into your PR dashboard. But the concept, and math, is very simple: average value per conversion event x number of conversion events.
With the organization of the Communicator’s Funnel and definition of strong metrics, the PR pro can leave behind conceptual conversations and focus on data-driven reporting. From reiterating PR theory to detailing actionable metrics (including suggested free tools), we’ve discussed the resources you need to build out the reporting system that elevates your success and gets the PR person or team the recognition they’ve earned.

Need a head start?
Download the spreadsheet companion based on the framework of the Communicator’s Funnel.
Learn More About TRENDKITE

See all of the detailed metrics from the Communicator’s Funnel in a custom dashboard for your brand.

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