The State of Data-Driven Communications

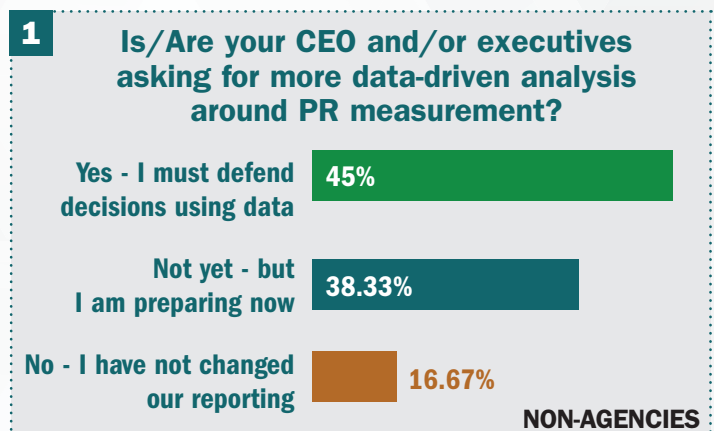*Research Report from PR News in partnership with PublicRelay*

In today's digital era, where nearly everything is measurable, digital communication has become part of that world. As such, digital technology should render nearly all of a communicator's actions and results quantifiable, making it easier to prove the value of what communicators do and how their actions contribute to a company's business goals and an organization's mission.

That's only the first step, of course. Going deeper with data should allow the communicator to derive insights from data, which should be part of a PR pro's arsenal to tie communications to business goals and make recommendations that will improve the operational efficiency of the organization.

> **We're seeing an upsurge in the marketplace for insight from data. There's definitely a wind at our back.**
>
> **—Eric Koefoot, President/CEO, PublicRelay**

Indeed, one of the trends that emerges in this second edition of "The State of Data-Driven Communications," a survey from PR News and PublicRelay, a media monitoring and analytics firm, is that senior leaders increasingly are asking PR pros to justify decisions with data (chart 1). Some 400 communicators responded to the survey during September and October of 2018; 85% of respondents were U.S. based.

1 Is/Are your CEO and/or executives asking for more data-driven analysis around PR measurement?

- Yes - I must defend decisions using data: **45%**
- Not yet - but I am preparing now: **38.33%**
- No - I have not changed our reporting: **16.67%**

NON-AGENCIES

Source: The State of Data-Driven Communications, PR News/PublicRelay, 2018.
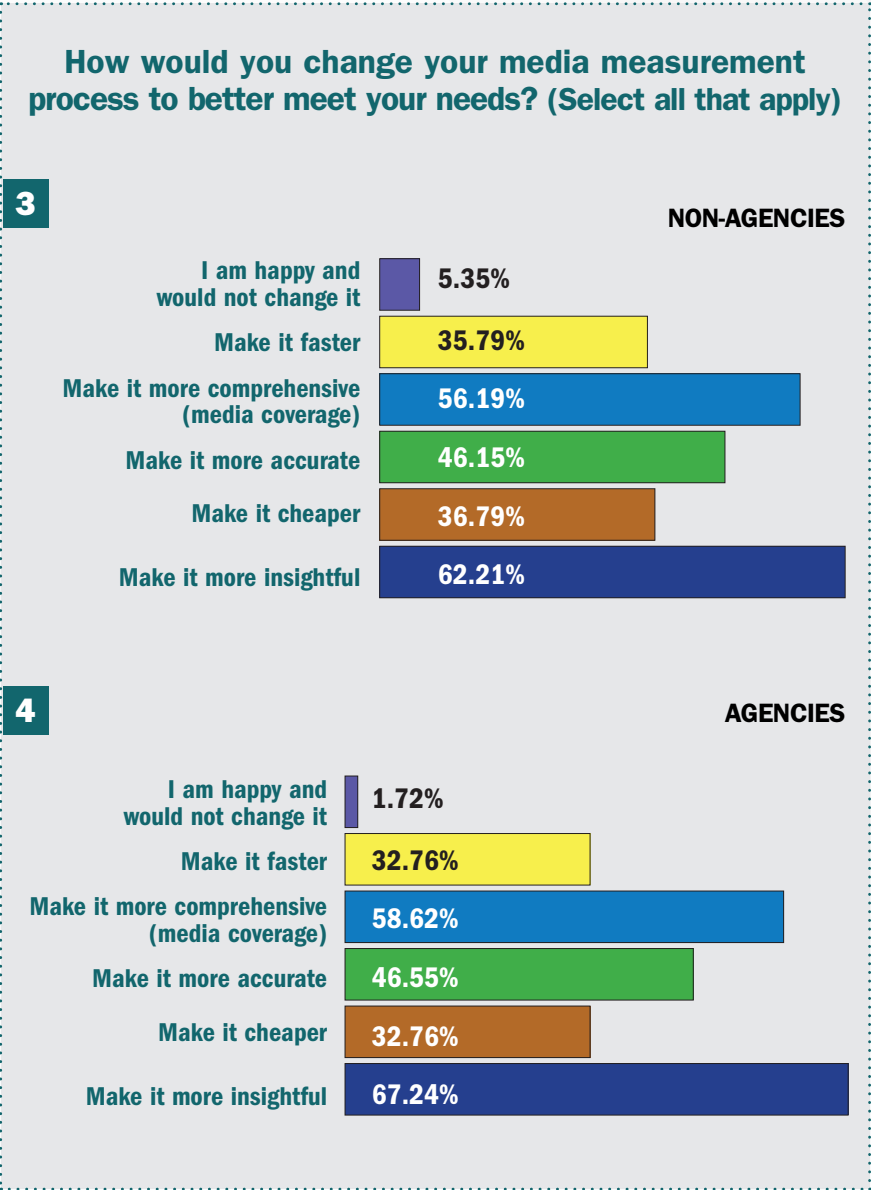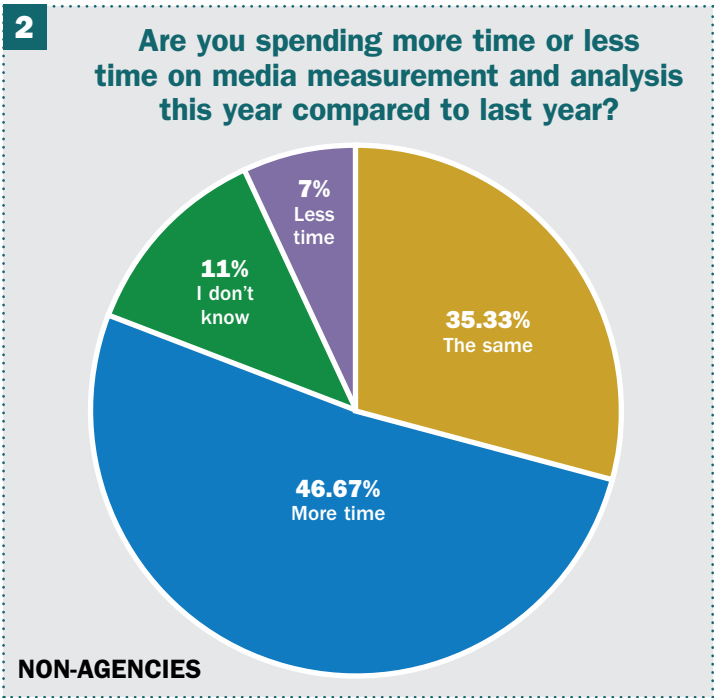
In addition, the study finds leaders at companies and organizations are interested in making their data efforts more insightful, comprehensive and complete (charts 3, 4).

As Eric Koefoot, president/CEO of PublicRelay, says, "We're seeing an upsurge in the marketplace for insight from data. There's definitely a wind at our back."

Kevin Winston, principal communications business partner at Genentech/Roche, agrees. "There's no question. The tide is changing" in favor of using data to garner insight. "Measurement used to be about numbers of clips and share of voice," he says, adding, "Communicators rarely used data to gain insights."

For example, 65 percent of the participants in the survey tell us they use media measurement "to show how our efforts are contributing to broader business goals" (chart 5).

This bolstering of the recognition that communication measurement is critical to success is welcome news for advocates of measurement. Data measurement long has been considered more of a burden than a way to establish communications as a strategic contributor to businesses and nonprofit organizations. The survey does not paint a completely upbeat picture of communications measurement, though. "83 percent of the people don't have reliable data," Koefoot says, referring to chart 6. "That's a problem and it's scary. How can you manage without good data?"

2 **Are you spending more time or less time on media measurement and analysis this year compared to last year?**

- 7% Less time
- 11% I don't know
- 35.33% The same
- 46.67% More time

NON-AGENCIES

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

3 **NON-AGENCIES**

- I am happy and would not change it — 5.35%
- Make it faster — 35.79%
- Make it more comprehensive (media coverage) — 56.19%
- Make it more accurate — 46.15%
- Make it cheaper — 36.79%
- Make it more insightful — 62.21%

4 **AGENCIES**

- I am happy and would not change it — 1.72%
- Make it faster — 32.76%
- Make it more comprehensive (media coverage) — 58.62%
- Make it more accurate — 46.55%
- Make it cheaper — 32.76%
- Make it more insightful — 67.24%

5 — **How do you use analysis from your media measurement program?(Select all that apply)**

Category	Percentage
Prove my department's worth - show what we've done	55.85%
Show how our efforts are contributing to broader business goals	64.88%
Understand our SOV against our competitors on our key brand messages	25.08%
Detail where we are meeting goals and where we need to improve/ reallocate resources	42.81%
Provide insight that will assist us in crafting better pitches	35.45%
Share hard data to calm executives who are quick to label any negative mention a crisis	16.05%
Quantify our brand reputation over time	42.81%
Justify additional budget to do more/better in the future	36.79%
We do not have a formal measurement program	16.05%

NON-AGENCIES

Adds Matt Anchin, CCO at Consumer Reports, "This lack of confidence in the data is indicative of how far we have yet to go as a profession in terms of our ability to sort and leverage data in a truly scientific and applied way."

Winston agrees, but believes communicators' lack of reliable data is a larger issue and one that touches nearly all industries.
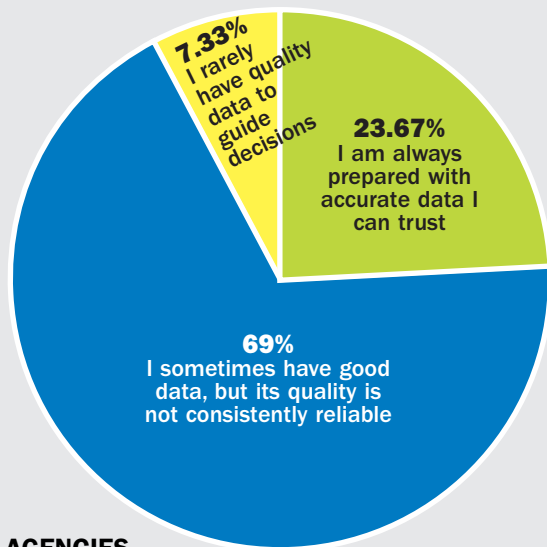
"This is not just a problem for communicators," he says. "There's so much data, it can be overwhelming. And it's really, really difficult to know what data is relevant and should be measured and synthesized into useful insights."

This year's responses to the question in charts 6 and 7 are comparable to those in the 2017 survey. Last year 74 percent of director-level communicators told us they "sometimes have good data" and 7 percent said they "rarely have quality data." 72 percent of VPs and higher said "sometimes" their data is reliable and three percent said "rarely."

There was a lot of reaction to charts 3 and 4, which show how respondents would improve their measurement programs. "Make it cheaper" and "make it faster" trailed all the change proposals, including the leader, "make it more insightful" (62 percent), make it more "accurate" (46 percent) and make it more "comprehensive" (56 percent). The conclusion: Communicators seem to put a premium on insight, comprehensiveness and accurate data.

Once again, the results on speed and cost were similar to those in the 2017 survey.

"Those answers are really anti- what you'd think you'd find in a highly competitive marketplace," Koefoot says. "You'd expect faster and cheaper to be the leaders."

NON-AGENCIES

- 7.33% I rarely have quality data to guide decisions
- 23.67% I am always prepared with accurate data I can trust
- 69% I sometimes have good data, but its quality is not consistently reliable

AGENCIES

- 15.25% I rarely have quality data to guide decisions
- 25.4% I am always prepared with accurate data I can trust
- 59.32% I sometimes have good data, but its quality is not consistently reliable
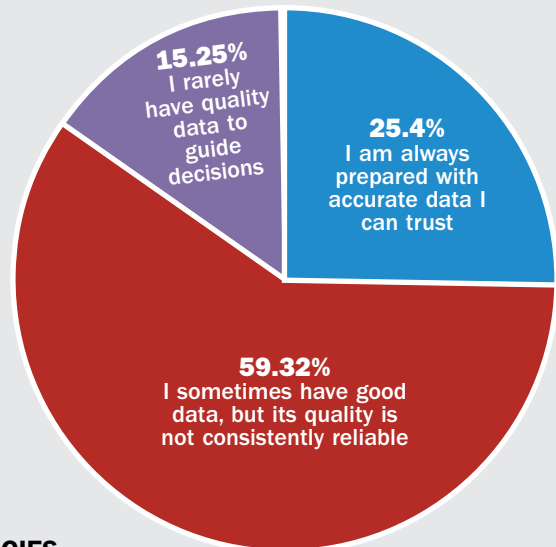
Anchin was "a little surprised" that there wasn't more of an emphasis on speed. "In the news cycles we live in…we no longer have days or hours to react, we're down to minutes."

He adds the "alignment" in the totals between Non-Agencies respondents (chart 3) and Agencies respondents (chart 4) was "very telling" about the importance of measurement and data. "As a very long-time in-house professional," he adds, "it's something I will be able to press agencies on as I look for strategic partners in the marketplace."

"I'm glad so many communicators want greater insight…we're using a tool here that's become a great source of insight. I'm starting to look at other tools to augment our suite. I'm very happy that I'm in a position to make the case for metrics-driven activity."

Koefoot sees charts 3 and 4 linking to the responses to chart 1's question: "Is/Are your CEO and/or executives asking for more data-driven analysis around PR measurement?"

Just about "everyone" (83 percent) is either being asked to defend decisions using data or preparing to do so, he says. "The results here are saying if your company isn't data-driven yet, it's coming fast, it's a freight train. That's not surprising. We're seeing that in the marketplace."

Anchin adds, "The existential threat where marketers were six to 10 years ago is where the leaders of our profession are at today. The decisions you make and the strategies you design, the results you deliver, if they're not data-driven, especially in a world where so much data is readily available, you're not going to be in a good place."
Taking it a step further, the savvy communicator uses insights from data to anticipate what's ahead. "That's where I'd rather be," Anchin says.
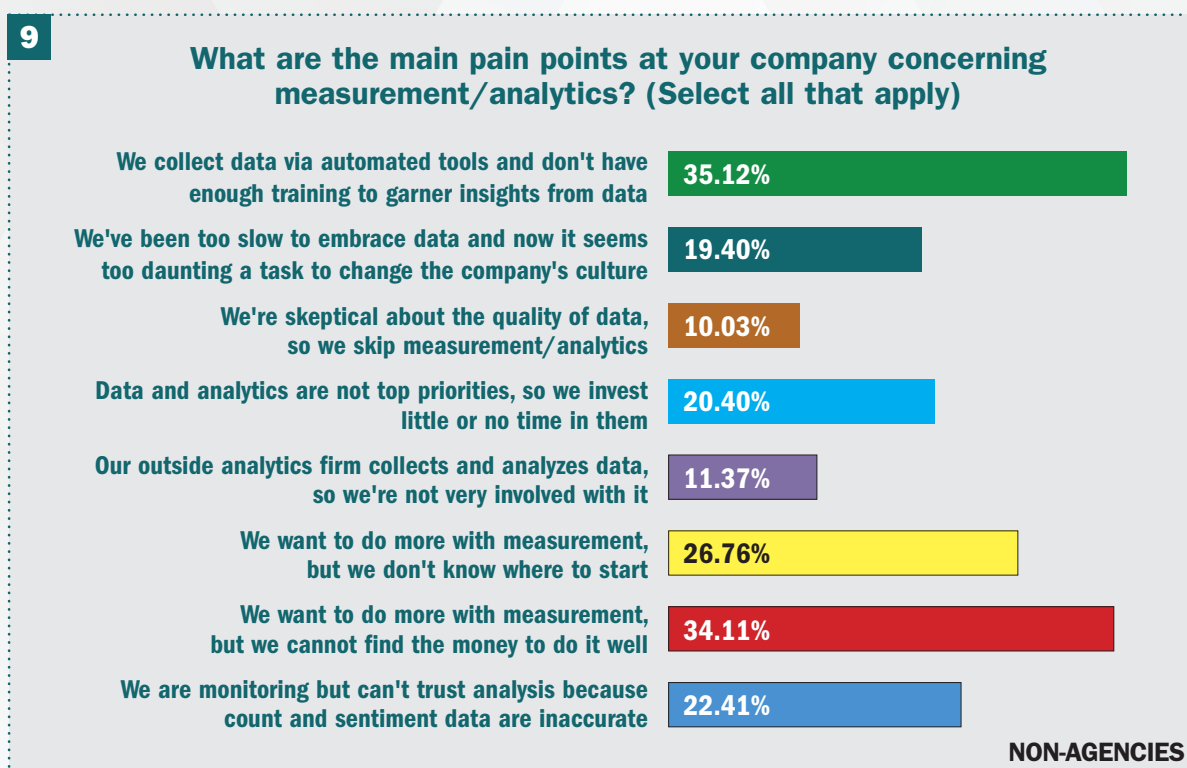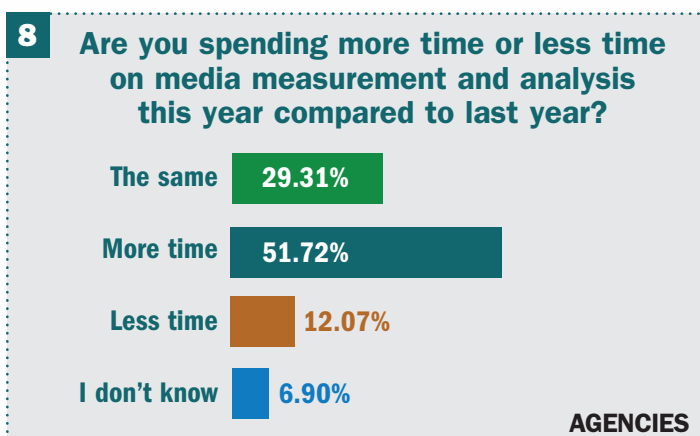
The idea that the profession is increasingly data driven also links up with charts 2 and 8's results, where communicators respond to, "Are you spending more time or less time on media measurement and analysis this year compared to last year?"

By comparison, last year 44 percent of director-level communicators said they spent more time on media analysis, 30 percent said the same amount of time. For VPs and higher, the responses were 64 percent more time; 22 percent said the same amount of time.

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

The same	29.31%
More time	51.72%
Less time	12.07%
I don't know	6.90%

AGENCIES

Several conclusions can be drawn from the 2018 responses. As Koefoot says, it takes time to deliver the comprehensive insights CEOs are seeking (charts 3 and 4). Adds Koefoot, "More and more companies are coming to us and saying, 'I'm working with data-driven analysis. And quick-and-dirty no longer carries water. I've got to do a better job. I'm being asked by my CEO for more data-driven insight.'"

On the other hand, spending more time with measurement, data and analysis might indicate that processes are overwhelming and perhaps confusing to communicators. As a result they need to spend more time just to cope.

"That's a fair point," Anchin says. "We are still light years behind where communications technology should be," he adds. Maybe the takeaway is that if communicators have to spend so much time with data "shouldn't technology be thrown at the problem, to collect and analyze data far more efficiently and powerfully? Should we be calling on service providers to do better and do more?"

9 What are the main pain points at your company concerning measurement/analytics? (Select all that apply)

We collect data via automated tools and don't have enough training to garner insights from data	35.12%
We've been too slow to embrace data and now it seems too daunting a task to change the company's culture	19.40%
We're skeptical about the quality of data, so we skip measurement/analytics	10.03%
Data and analytics are not top priorities, so we invest little or no time in them	20.40%
Our outside analytics firm collects and analyzes data, so we're not very involved with it	11.37%
We want to do more with measurement, but we don't know where to start	26.76%
We want to do more with measurement, but we cannot find the money to do it well	34.11%
We are monitoring but can't trust analysis because count and sentiment data are inaccurate	22.41%

NON-AGENCIES

In addition, as you can see on chart 9, the largest pain point (35 percent) involves communicators lacking the training needed to garner deep insights from tools. Maybe a lack of training is why PR pros are spending more time on data.

Koefoot agrees that providers need to do more. "On the training, that's on the providers, all of us. If we have a tool and we're not providing training, shame on us. We're not supporting the industry," he says.

Anchin adds, "Perhaps the balance between art and science in this profession is a little out of whack." It's great to have automated tools, but more than training in how to use the tools, you need people who possess an awareness of data's value and "where you should push for more and better."

Winston says the tools response on chart 9 is "a bit surprising…it's not rocket science. You hire data people" who can use tools to gain valuable insights from measurement. He adds, "Having a tool is the least of it. We all think [AI] can replace human beings, but you need humans to make sense" of what's being measured. "You have to have [staff or a vendor] trained to understand data so you can gain value from insights."

Speaking of chart 9, Anchin is dismayed with the 20.40 percent response that "data and analytics are not top priorities, so we invest little or no time on them." As a profession, he says, "We should want that to be zero."

10

How do you use analysis from your media measurement program?
(Select all that apply)

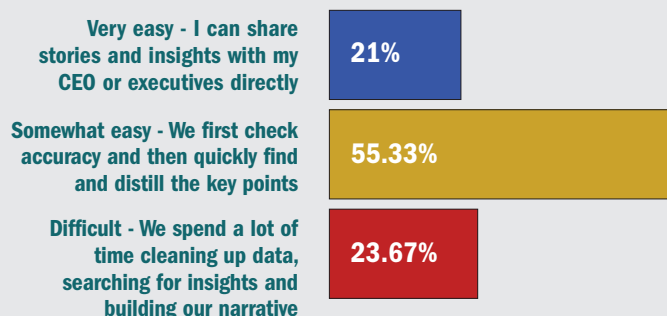| Question	Percentage
Prove my department's worth - show what we've done	55.85%
Show how our efforts are contributing to broader business goals	64.88%
Understand our SOV against our competitors on our key brand messages	25.08%
Detail where we are meeting goals and where we need to improve/reallocate resources	42.81%
Provide insight that will assist us in crafting better pitches	35.45%
Share hard data to calm executives who are quick to label any negative mention a crisis	16.05%
Quantify our brand reputation over time	42.81%
Justify additional budget to do more/better in the future	36.79%
We do not have a formal measurement program	16.05%

NON-AGENCIES

OTHER RESULTS

11 Who is responsible for collecting and analyzing media data for your measurement program? (Select all that apply)

- I don't know — **3.34%**
- Our PR agency — **19.06%**
- An outside media analytics firm — **18.06%**
- Our marketing department — **27.09%**
- Our internal staff — **72.91%**
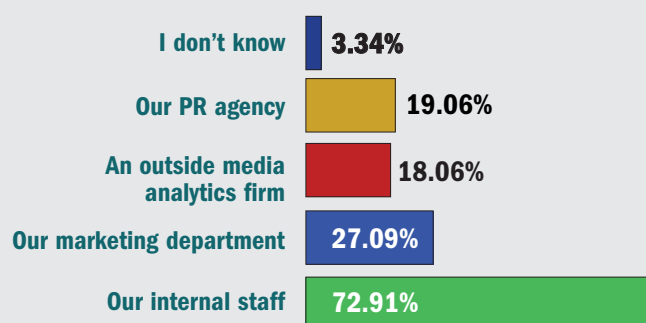
NON-AGENCIES

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

- Very easy - I can share stories and insights with my CEO or executives directly — **21%**
- Somewhat easy - We first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points — **55.33%**
- Difficult - We spend a lot of time cleaning up data, searching for insights and building our narrative — **23.67%**
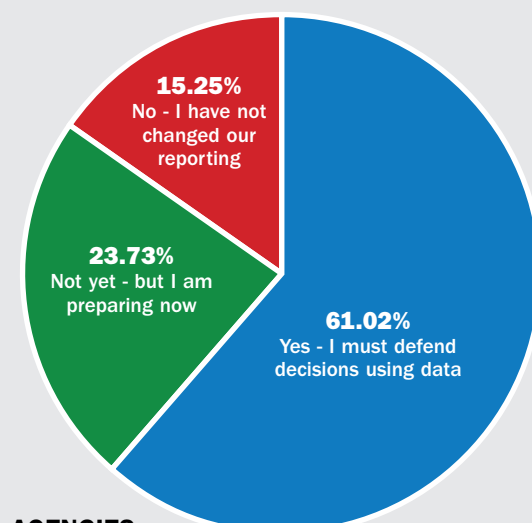
NON-AGENCIES

13 Instead of media analysis, which of the following communications activities would you rather be doing? (Select all that apply)

- None - I'm a data scientist — **4.37%**
- Pitching or reaching out to influencers — **44.66%**
- Media training executives — **19.42%**
- Building strategic messaging plans — **76.70%**
- Creating investor relations programs — **11.65%**
- Improving crisis management plans — **30.58%**
- Augmenting social media brand strategy — **50.97%**
- Managing and pitching our spokespeople — **29.61%**

NON-AGENCIES

14 Is/Are your CEO and/or executives asking for more data-driven analysis around PR measurement?

- **15.25%** No - I have not changed our reporting
- **23.73%** Not yet - but I am preparing now
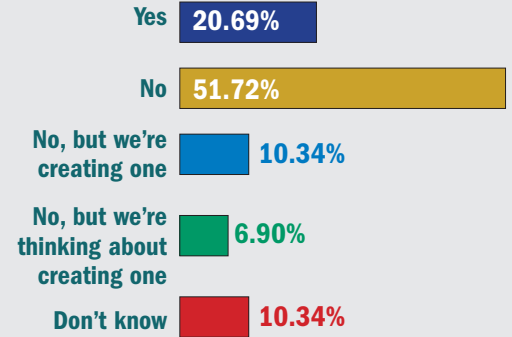- **61.02%** Yes - I must defend decisions using data

AGENCIES

Source: The State of Data-Driven Communications, PR News/PublicRelay, 2018.

15 — Instead of media analysis, which of the following communications activities would you rather be doing? (Select all that apply)
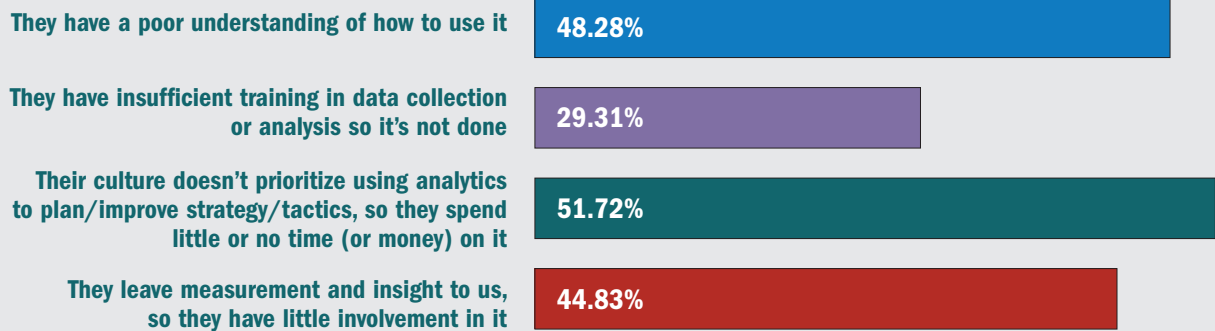
Activity	%
None - I'm a data scientist	6.12%
Pitching or reaching out to influencers	38.78%
Media training executives	30.61%
Building strategic messaging plans	75.51%
Creating investor relations programs	8.16%
Improving crisis management plans	36.73%
Augmenting social media brand strategy	44.90%
Managing and pitching our spokespeople	32.65%

AGENCIES

16 — Is measurement/analytics enough of a priority for your agency to have an in-house analytics department?

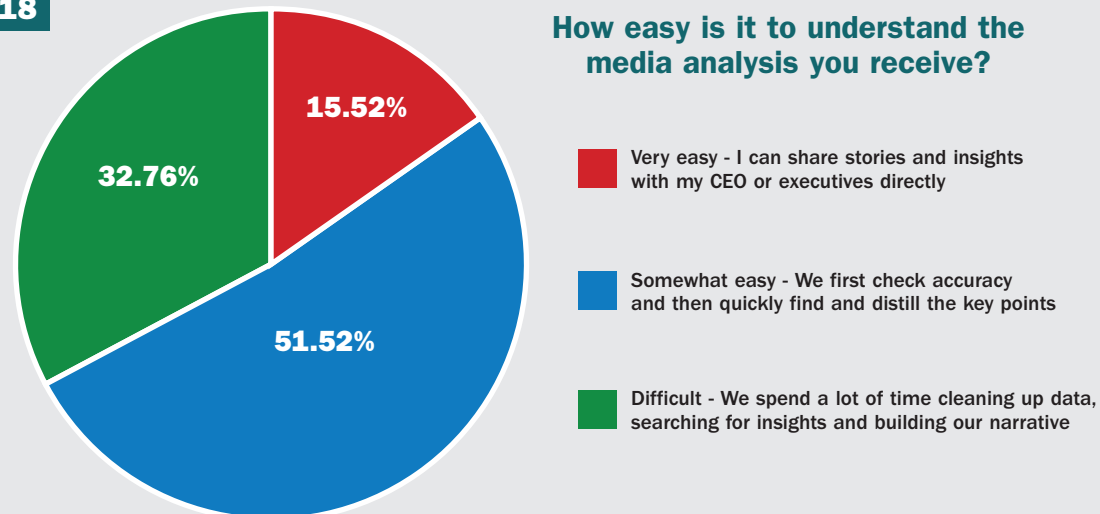| Response	%
Yes	20.69%
No	51.72%
No, but we're creating one	10.34%
No, but we're thinking about creating one	6.90%
Don't know	10.34%

AGENCIES

17 — What is/are the most common issue(s) your clients have with data/analytics? (Select all that apply)

Issue	%
They have a poor understanding of how to use it	48.28%
They have insufficient training in data collection or analysis so it's not done	29.31%
Their culture doesn't prioritize using analytics to plan/improve strategy/tactics, so they spend little or no time (or money) on it	51.72%
They leave measurement and insight to us, so they have little involvement in it	44.83%

AGENCIES

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

- 15.52% — Very easy - I can share stories and insights with my CEO or executives directly
- 51.52% — Somewhat easy - We first check accuracy and then quickly find and distill the key points
- 32.76% — Difficult - We spend a lot of time cleaning up data, searching for insights and building our narrative

AGENCIES

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