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EVALUATE PR INFLUENCE BY CRUNCHING A FEW NUMBERS

By Clive Camm

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Everybody wants to see tangible results when they invest their hard-earned cash. But when it comes to public relations, we are dealing with ideas and persuasion rather than nuts and bolts. There is an ongoing challenge in the communications business to prove that a \$50,000 PR campaign, for example, generated at least \$50,000 worth of business-building media. Here's one way to get a quantifiable evaluation of your media relations programs.

Content analysis is the rather dry term used to describe the quantitative and qualitative value of news stories generated by an organization's PR department. Content analysis goes beyond determining "equivalent advertising value" – what the coverage would cost if it were purchased as advertising - to determine the impact of specific messages on reporters in a media campaign.

And while learning that the equivalent ad value of your campaign is multiples greater than your original budget is indeed gratifying, diving deeper into the details will tell you whether your messages are hitting their mark and how a campaign may be refined to increase its effectiveness.

IS YOUR NEWS GENERALLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE? In comprehensive content analysis, we tabulate every news story and track how positively or negatively news items about your organization are being covered.

WHICH OF YOUR MESSAGES ARE BEING CONVEYED? Most organizations seeking media coverage understand the power of key messages - the, perhaps, three succinct media lines that are woven into interviews, releases and other interactions with the media. Content analysis, we can tell

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you whether those messages are getting out. It will also tell you the specific issues the media is focusing on.

HOW SUPPORTIVE ARE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS REACTING TO YOUR NEWS? You'll have supporters and critics of your news and content analysis can tabulate what third-party commentators are saying about you and your organization.

WHAT PRIORITY DID THE MEDIA GIVE YOUR NEWS? In newspapers, for instance, most readers look at pictures, captions, headlines and other "display" copy. They tend to read the first few paragraphs of a story rather than the whole story. They tend to spend more time with

the front page than other sections. Consequently, your story has more impact if it has more prominence or if it comes with a picture. It has much less impact if it is buried. Similarly, if your organization's name is in the lead of a story, the coverage is more valuable than if you are mentioned at the end of a story. Comprehensive content analysis will assess the impact you carry with the story.

WHERE ARE YOUR MESSAGES BEING SEEN? Although content analysis can't tell you who read your article, it can tell you media outlet-by-media outlet which audiences were exposed to your message.

Not only does content analysis assist you in objectively assessing your campaigns, it can also highlight other communications issues that need to be addressed. Organizations that are sensitive to developing issues - nascent stories that are gathering steam and will need to be dealt with in the future - find that continual analysis of their news coverage helps them manage, defuse or deflect problems before they become problems. Alternatively, content analysis helps organizations identify new opportunities that they would not otherwise see.

Of course, there is a cost to doing comprehensive content analysis. Depending on the volume of news items, it may cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 per month. But organizations that make content analysis an integral part of their communications strategy report that they can, based on the hard evidence, make decisions about and refinements to campaigns that yield a high return on that investment.

Clive Camm is VP at Verus Public Relations (<http://www.verus.com>) and provides the only comprehensive content analysis service in western Canada. A specialist in campaign evaluations, he has a special summer PR package to introduce organizations to the promotional power of the media

and the Internet.

Accounting – All Businesses Need One.

By Article Submissions

As business becomes more and more global, and complexities continue to emerge, certain fields have gained prominence in today's career market. One of these is accounting. Accounting is a very conceptual career or task, more a question of information handling than any hands-on approach to product development. However, as trends change, accounting is becoming a little more diverse and less just a question of 'crunching numbers'.

These days, there are specific kinds of accountants who do separate jobs as part of a given company. There are accountants who monitor spending and resource use; these are called 'audit' accountants. Then there are other professionals who use accounting information to guide procedures and to facilitate decision-making, and these are referred to as 'management' accountants.

One could say that while audit accountants are involved in book-keeping history, management accounting is a process of looking to the future to try to foresee events and plan for these in terms of a company's resources. 'Ledgers' and classic ideas of accounting belong more to audit accounting, while management accounting deals directly with the machinery of a firm. Both positions require people skills and analytical skills; both types of accountants need to know how to use computers. Spreadsheet software like Microsoft Excel is popular in keeping accounting information available in a flexible format.

As to the issue of how the two are related, audit accounting is often considered more essential to small businesses. A small business may not need any more oversight than the owner or general manager can provide, but someone always had to keep the books. Also, in management, the old adage may apply that 'too many cooks spoil the broth'. Management accounting seems to be a more useful role in large companies that need many consultants to micro-manage a variety of projects.

In general, accounting is becoming a popular career choice. Some may shy away from it due to an aversion to how accountants have been described in the past. Some people 'don't like numbers' and consider accounting work to be unbearably dry or tedious. Others, however, have already completed their degree to become a CPA (Certified Public Accountant) and these may find themselves well placed in high-profile audit accounting positions. For others, management accounting provides a new look at a classic career.

Either way, the study of this valuable field can be a good way to get into a certain kind of company. many companies are hiring temporary accountants, and the abundance of opportunities means that employers and university graduates may be able to find each other through the phenomenon of accounting, as the majority of businesses turn their efforts toward the study of resource allocation, asset management, or more simply, crunching numbers.

Robert Michael is a writer for OZ Accounting which is an excellent place to find accounting links, resources and articles. For more information go to:

<http://www.ozaccounting.com>



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