
Editorial: Evaluation – let's get on with it!

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Measurement and evaluation have long been top of the public relations issues list. They are a perennial topic for practitioners and academics with dedicated conferences, websites, trade and academic publications, and books feeding the interest.

Many have argued that (a) all the methodology is already available and (b) it is time to focus on effectiveness in use. Jim Grunig and Larissa Grunig, speaking at the BledCom 2005 conference, both commented that public relations deals with ill-structured problems and should be using a range of mostly qualitative measurement tools. Jon White, at the same conference, used the metaphor of public relations evaluation discussion being like “a car stuck in mud with its wheels spinning”: the debate goes around, but there is no traction.

So this special edition of *PRism*, devoted to measurement and evaluation, has been planned to give you the opportunity to read about latest research and best practice and to consider case studies. In a departure from the *PRism* norm, Commentary articles in academic format from leading practitioners have been included to give a highly developed practitioner perspective. As editor, my view is that the exchange of knowledge between academics and practitioners is vital for the continuing progress of public relations theory and practice. In this edition of *PRism*, this is taking place in the Commentaries along with a forward-looking Case Study.

In the Articles, Joy Chia questions whether the current vogue of proposing public relations to be “relationship management” is foundering on a misunderstanding of relationships. It’s a challenging view that will encourage debate,

especially in relation to the prominence of the Hon and Grunig approaches to measurement of relationships with stakeholders.

Zoe Hibbert and Peter Simmons have studied the nature of relationships between the media and the Australian Defence Force public affairs operation during the Iraq war, using the Hon & Grunig approach and Grunig’s qualitative methodology. With adaptations, they found it to be a powerful tool.

Robina Xavier, Amisha Mehta and Anne Gregory have continued a research programme started in 2004 by investigating practitioners’ notions of effectiveness in evaluation and propose steps to increase the use of evaluation techniques by practitioners through public relations professional bodies.

The Commentaries are from German practitioner Christoph Lautenbach on a best practice-led approach to evaluation called the Communications Values System, which has its genesis in the mid-1990s notion of “Return on Communications” developed by the Swedish public relations body; while well-known Australian evaluation expert Jim Macnamara makes the case for a two-tier approach to evaluation. Both commentators seek to give credibility to public relations activities at senior management level in organisations.

The Case Study is from Geneva-based Glenn O’Neil on the use of blogs, mash-up pages and wikis to evaluate the impact of an event upon participants and in the achievement of its objectives. For “digital immigrants”, like the editor, it is a valuable study on the expansion of evaluation using the tools of digital media.

Finally, Chris Galloway reports on the annual International Public Relations Research Conference in Miami, aptly titled “Pools, People and PR”; and there are book reviews of Heath and Coombs’s new “Today’s Public Relations”, surely the replacement for Cutlip, Center and Broom’s bible of US public relations education; and of Andy Ford’s guide to using SPSS, which (in the editor’s experience) is a wonderful data processing software for PR evaluation.

Thanks are expressed to all the many, unnameable reviewers who have read the abstracts and articles. Their contribution has been most valuable.

I hope you enjoy this Special Edition of *PRism*. Please contact the authors with your questions and comments. Publication via the internet is just part of a continuing process of knowledge transfer and debate. So read on ... and keep evaluating!

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