Measuring real impact, not just values

Does your measurement recipe have the right ingredients?

Historically, media metrics have measured the dollar amount of a placement as though it were advertising. They had been useful in determining what the cost would have been had you been paying for advertising, but media values are of little importance in the best recipes for true public relations measurement. A good measurement methodology allows you to improve the effectiveness of your company’s public relations effort across a broad swath of media, by showing you exactly where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Knowing your true impact indicates whether or not you should adjust your strategy. At Universal Information Services, we have developed such a metric in our Impact Score. The following information is presented to assist you with your PR measurement efforts. Our proprietary metric is fully compliant with the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) standards for communications measurement, staying current with all updates to the Barcelona Principles – most recently the Barcelona Principles 2.0. Check your recipe for success against the following information.

Three Essential Ingredients

Say you run a PR firm in New York City. You would want to ensure the following points are considered in order to glean the true impact of your media:

- **Tone/Sentiment** – Favorability matters. The publicity value of your placement might be $1M, but if that article mentions you in an unfavorable way it surely offsets that $1M worth of visibility by the damage it can inflict. In an era when something as innocuous as a Reddit post can create a public relations nightmare, regularly monitoring your tone across diverse sources of media is crucial - just ask Golden Corral (http://mashable.com/2013/07/08/reddit-golden-corral/#q8QIuFqIYOqn).

- **Message Drivers** – Sure, you might be mentioned in the Denver Post. But is it the coverage you want the world to see? Let’s say you need to highlight your new green initiatives in the press, for example. If you’re only tracking media values, or even the number of mentions, you won’t be able to measure the impact of those initiatives with media values alone – quantitative metrics don’t tell you what the article is “about.” A metric that incorporates a score for hitting your qualitative drivers shows whether you’re succeeding.
• Publication importance – A score that takes into consideration the readership/viewership of an outlet gives you more complete results or the quality of the publication relative to your PR goals. You might be hitting all of your qualitative drivers and you might be described favorably, but is your coverage being seen by anyone – furthermore, is your coverage being seen by your stakeholders and key audience? The true PR value of targeting major, national news outlets for your coverage is not accurately measured in dollars, but in impact.

Tone, message drivers, and publication importance are the key ingredients of understanding your media’s true impact. You might be able to get media values from your metrics, but you’re not necessarily getting insight. True insight comes from a comprehensive and rigorous analysis that includes a measure of your media impact.

Impact vs. Values

An Impact Score goes beyond dollar amounts – it tells you the whole impact of a story or mention. Rather than just telling you your placement is worth $3,000, you can see how much IMPACT it has by tracking several conditions – the size of the publication, the tone of the article, the placement and finally which message drivers you hit. By assigning points to each of these categories and putting them together, you end up with a composite score. This score tells you exactly how much impact a particular mention has, and by taking your coverage in aggregate, it tells you how much impact you have over time.

To contrast the measure of impact vs. the measure of values, consider the following two charts. Both charts use the same (real) dataset but one is a measure of media values and the other a measure of impact. There is a correlation between media values and impact – Q3 is clearly the highest in both graphs – but while Q2 had higher media values over Q1 and Q4, the Impact Score chart shows that in actuality Q2 had the least overall impact as Q1 and not nearly as strong as Q4. This could be that content in Q2, while possibly being featured in major outlets or had negative coverage, or their important PR pushes weren’t being covered. One might infer that Q2 was a success from its media values alone, but that is only telling part of the story. This is the danger of making important business and PR decisions from media values alone. Without a deeper dive into your coverage, you are more than likely missing important information that your data is telling you.

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Fig.1: Total media value of 2017 coverage by quarter

Fig.2: The same dataset but using the Impact Score instead of media values
Mixing It All Together

Now we’re beginning to develop the key ingredients needed for real insight. So how does it work? Quite simply, a numerical score is assigned to each condition. Here is Chicago Staplers’ methodology:

**True, Measureable Impact** = Tone + Qualitative Drivers + Publication Importance

**Ingredients**

**Tone**

Tone: 10 points for a positive hit, 5 for neutral, -15 for negative. Negative stories are weighed more heavily against you because they are more harmful to your PR efforts.

**Qualitative Drivers**

Qualitative Drivers: 5 points for each driver (key message) hit.

**Publication Importance**

Publication Importance: 45 points for a hit that falls within your “Tier 1” outlets, these are your targeted publications, your most sought after publications. 30 points for a hit for your secondary audience or your “Tier 2” outlets. 15 points for your less important publications, your “Tier 3” outlets.

Once scores are tallied, you simply add them together, giving you a maximum of 100 possible points (assuming nine drivers – the score is customizable and depends upon the needs of the client).

Let’s take a look at an example with coverage from a national chain of hospitals headquartered in New York City, Hospital X.

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The table above lists three articles, one from the *The Day* (Hartford/New Haven), one from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* and one from the *The Oregonian*. Let’s analyze how much impact each article has for Hospital X.
Many companies focus only on media values and circulations/impressions - that information is presented in the third and seventh columns. We can see that the hit from the Oregonian, a national newspaper, generate much higher circulation numbers and media values than the other two hits, which are from local newspapers in Spokane and Hartford/New Haven ($1,092 and $5,883, respectively). Does this mean that the *The Oregonian* article is more impactful than the others?

*The Day* from the Hartford/New Haven article may have a smaller circulation, giving it 15 Publication Points versus *The Oregonian*’s forty-five. But the *The Oregonian* article is about Hospital X employees stealing patient information and is thus negative, while the Hartford/New Haven article mentions Hospital X as being one of the top hospitals in the region for cancer research. The tone of the articles gives the *U.S. News* article -15 Tone Points, with the Chattanooga article earning 10. This 25 point difference gives the Chattanooga article a boost in impact.

**Using the Impact Score**

Once a basic understanding of the Impact Score is obtained, it can be used to determine just what aspects of your media outreach contribute more favorably to more impact.

For example, which type of media generates the greatest impact for your company? Fig. 3 is the same as Fig. 2 but the Impact Score is broken out by media type. You can see that Q3’s high Impact Score was propelled by web and print coverage and Q4 primarily by web hits:

![Total Impact Scores by Media Type](image)

*Fig. 3: Q3 clearly had the highest Impact of 2017, driven in particular by web and print coverage*

So we are closer to understanding the story of why Q3’s media generated such a large impact. We know the print and web hits made more of an impact than broadcast hits.
Let’s break down the Impact further to see what other factors are contributing to Hospital X’s score.

Fig. 4 shows Tone (favorability) by quarter and media type. Looking at the purple bar on Q3 broadcast we see the negative effect of the ex-employee-turned-thief. This story wasn’t picked up as much, or the story was made negligible by others mentions in print and web coverage. The chart also shows us that Q3 wasn’t the most favorable quarter for any segment in 2015. Q4 print is the most favorable, so there must be something else at play.

**Average Tone Points by Quarter**

![Average Tone Points by Quarter](image)

*Fig. 4: Q4 print had the most positive coverage of the year, while Q3 broadcast was the least. In fact, it trended negative overall*

The below chart shows Hospital X’s volume of placements. We can see that volume was a contributing factor to that quarter’s Impact Score due to high number of articles coming from small market publications in Q3. Doing a deeper analysis of the data, we found that Hospital X sponsored a charity marathon event in suburban New York, drawing a lot of coverage from small outlets New York and New Jersey. We can interpret this to mean that the event caused a significant impact for Hospital X. We can
also deduce that, at least for Q3, it was volume in small market publications, not just favorability, which drove impact.

Fig. 5: Q3’s high volume of small market outlets contributed to its high Impact Score

The Impact Score can even show the degree of message penetration, and which messages contributed the most to the score. The graph below shows a sampling of Hospital X’s qualitative drivers and their corresponding tone from the third quarter:
We can see that in Q3 there were about as many positive articles as neutral articles (and three negative articles) concerning Hospital X’s sponsored marathon event. It turns out that three articles disparaged the event for causing traffic jams, but many journalists covered the event positively. While they had a smaller volume of coverage, Hospital X’s Oncology Center also contributed to the Impact Score. It turns out one of their doctors was recognized for his research on breast cancer, a positive mention.

**Conclusion**

Because an Impact Score incorporates several metrics – tone, message drivers, circulation and positioning points, there is almost no limit to what it can show. Which types of newspapers, large national pubs or small local ones, tend to cover you most favorably? Which drivers tend to be featured in which newscast? Does Hospital X need to do something to get more media attention for its Mental Health facility? An Impact Score can tell you all of this and more.

When you analyze your data in this way, you can develop a sound strategy to continually refine and perfect your media outreach and gather important insights along the way. By combining these key ingredients, you will, in effect, be able to have your cake and eat it, too.

For additional help with your media measurement efforts, contact us (800) 408-3178.