

Entrants: Angela D. Sinickas, ABC, and Sam Shiromani; Sinickas Communications, Inc. (SCI)
Title of Entry: *Measurement Works*
Category: Category 29: Digital Communication Vehicles
Time Period: August 2011 - March 2013
Brief Description: A monthly e-newsletter to help communicators build measurement into all they do so they can make better decisions using research results. The goal is to provide practical tips to make communicators more successful—and to encourage more revenue for our firm.

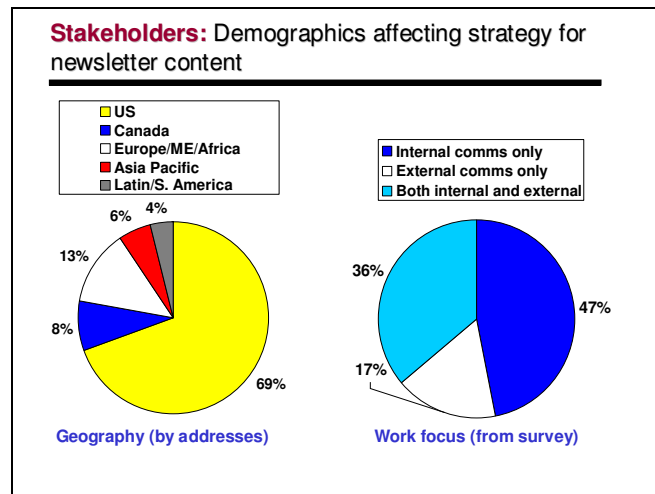
Business Need/Opportunity

Stakeholder needs: Communicators face a dilemma: They are being expected to prove the value of their function, but 40% say they have no budget for measurement (based on our own March 2013 survey). Compounding their dilemma, their knowledge about measurement is also fairly low, as typified by a 2011 survey conducted by the European Association of Communication Directors that shows that only 38% realize that return on investment needs to include money in the calculation. Clearly, communicators need practical advice on what they can measure meaningfully, but quickly and cheaply.

SCI's business needs: Communication measurement became the natural focus of Sinickas Communications when the firm started in business in 2000 because of the founder's passionate evangelism for communication measurement through prolific writing and speaking on the topic since 1981. The firm's business need is to market itself to prospective clients and have them think of us when they need help with a measurement project. Standing out from the crowd has become increasingly important as the majority of communication consultants are now saying they can conduct research for clients in addition to the core services they offer. We had intended to create a newsletter for several years because we had noticed that whenever we sent out a reprint of a recent article to our contact list, we received a spate of emails and phone calls about projects and speaking opportunities. However, lack of time kept postponing this intention. With the advent of Constant Contact, it became easy to use its newsletter lay-out template to structure a start-up publication, and to be able to track reader usage automatically. A monthly newsletter provides an opportunity to stay in front of thousands of communicators once a month at relatively low cost to generate new leads.

Stakeholder Analysis

Primary audience: The core audience is corporate communicators around the world who either receive their own copy of the newsletter or have one forwarded to them (3,929 on our list as of March 1, 2013). They already have some level of interest in measurement because they have previously requested to receive this type of information from us—either purchasing a product or asking for article or slide reprints. Based on the ratio of new contacts added since August 2011 whose emails are still active vs. people who have unsubscribed (970/201 = 4.8:1), this audience is growing substantially as readers continue to forward the newsletter to others or people link to an archived copy from social media posts and choose to subscribe. (Our 2013 survey shows that 42% of those who read our newsletter have forwarded it to at least one other person.). Our subscribers' geographical dispersion is reflected in the left pie chart above; 69% of those on our contact list are in the US, 8% in Canada, 4% in Latin America, 13% in Europe/Middle East/Africa and 6% in Asia-Pacific. About 47% of our contacts manage only internal communication and 17% manage only external, with the rest responsible for both (see results in the right-hand image above based on our March 2013 survey). Our audience is fairly experienced in communication, so we gear the level of content to them: About 38% have more than 20 years of experience and another 43% have 11-20 years of experience. About 40% are directors or above, 23% are supervisors/managers, and 27% are specialists.



Secondary audience: Educators and other consultants/bloggers represent 10% of our contact list. While they are not likely to become clients, they are influencers with powerful networks.

Goals and Objectives

1. **Provide enduring value to communication practitioners.** Our specific objectives to reach the goal:
 - a. **Make measurement easy to understand:** Write the newsletter to be understandable by the average reader. Since most have university degrees, this translates to writing no higher than a Flesch-Kincaid score of 16.0. We also want those who have not yet conducted measurement to feel inspired to try it; our target from a survey question was 67%. (Opinion survey results that are 67% favorable are considered to be at “strength level,” although a much lower level would be considered strong for questions asking about behavior change instead of opinions.)
 - b. **Align content with our stakeholders’ characteristics** (see stakeholder section above) to make sure that at least 17% of articles mention external communication measurement and at least 31% have an overt mention of people or work done outside the US.
 - c. **Be useful:** Achieve at least a 67% favorable survey rating on the perceived usefulness of the newsletter and at least 33% saying they have already used something they read about in a recent issue. In addition, we wanted to have a better open rate than the 13.25% Constant Contact average for our Marketing/Adv/PR industry, which is an additional way to gauge usefulness.
2. **Use the newsletter to grow our client base by building the reputation of Sinickas Communications, Inc. as a consulting firm of choice for practical, business-focused measurement of corporate communication.** Our specific objectives to reach this goal were:
 - a. **Immediate financial return:** Obtain at least a 200% return on investment from revenue generated directly from the newsletter in 2011-2013. Revenue was tracked in two ways: (1) We created a new gmail address that is used only within the newsletter, which proves that any incoming emails by gmail were triggered by the newsletter. (2) When new opportunities arose by phone or regular email, we asked what led to the request.
 - b. **Long-term financial impact:** Influence at least 67% of communicators on our distribution list who have not yet worked with us, and who have measurement budgets available, to say the newsletter has made them more likely to want to hire us as consultants or buy our products.

Solution Overview

Development: Angela develops the recurring content to be different from what other measurement consultants are doing, with the main focus being to provide practical take-aways from each issue. The rationale for each recurring element:

- **Main article:** These are often versions of Angela’s own copyrighted articles published in the past elsewhere. Each is focused on practical ways research and measurement can be used by the average communicator, even if they don’t have a budget.
- **Client/database article:** Examples of actual survey questions, report formats or actionable results mined from my database that readers can use in their own work.
- **Outside opinion pieces:** These are usually inspirational, first-person stories from other communicators about how easily they used measurement and what impact it had on their organizations and their own careers.
- **Tip of the month:** These usually provide explanations of how to do some technical aspect of research better.
- **Multi-media element:** Either PowerPoint slides, a video or podcast on a topic related to the issue. This makes use of one of the benefits of electronic newsletters—crossing multiple platforms.
- **Summary of measurement discussions on LinkedIn forums:** Because Constant Contact’s template does not allow for two-way “social” communication, highlighting different hot topics being discussed online brings in a two-way element into the newsletter, without actually hosting the discussion ourselves. This helps engage our stakeholders in conversations about measurement.

Key messages: The newsletter’s over-arching key messages—practical tips that make measurement easy to do and reinforcement that measurement should focus on business results—are consistent with our company brand characteristics (“Focused diagnostics. Practical solutions. Business results.”) Write-in comments from our 2012 and 2013 surveys actually mentioned these messages repeatedly in describing what readers like about the newsletter. Even though we are giving away free information, our experience

shows that readers with budgets hire us on the basis of our practical and useful approach to either do research for them or train their staffs on how to do it themselves.

Format: One of our staff, Sam Shiromani, participated in a Constant Contact training session and developed font and color styles for the newsletter that match our corporate colors. A key decision was how much text to have visible in the newsletter and how much to hide behind the links. Based on informal research with clients, we decided to have enough information visible that all the key points could be gleaned without clicking through for the majority of readers. Therefore, while we monitor click-throughs, our goal is *not* to increase this number over time. Our survey results validate our earlier qualitative research: 69% prefer the current balance of visible vs. click-through text, and only 25% would prefer more to be kept behind the links. In addition, 25% of readers print out at least some issues, so our approach works better for them as well.

Distribution: The subscription list is broken into Americas, Asia-Pacific and EMEA so that these emails can be scheduled to arrive at an optimum time in each of these geographies—about the middle of the day in the middle of the week.

Marketing: Angela increases the visibility of the newsletter by posting updates on the topics covered in each new issue on Twitter (724 followers), LinkedIn (1,682 connections) and Facebook (267 friends). In addition, if it is relevant to a LinkedIn discussion forum, she also includes a link to an archived copy of a related newsletter issue. We track the number of clicks on the bitly.com links to the issues we use in the postings. In just the first six days after the March 2013 issue was distributed and started being promoted in social media, 143 clicks were recorded on the bitly link, which usually results in additional subscriptions.

Implementation and Challenges

- **Budget total of \$13,200.** *Direct cost:* \$3,600 two-year cost for the Constant Contact subscription, which included the initial seminar. There is no direct cost for writing since external contributors have written for free. *Indirect cost:* Based on the amount of time each issue requires, we estimate the proportional staff salary involved in having created the 15 issues so far was approximately \$9,600.
- **Time frame:** We work on several issues at once and release them within the first three weeks of each month. We temporarily suspended the newsletter during part of 2012 due to time pressures related to several family illnesses.
- **Formatting limitations:** Constant Contact offers a limited number of layout formats. Within those limitations, Sam Shiromani designed color and font options to maximize readability on the screen. However, due to Constant Contact's programming, when readers print the publication out, many color elements disappear, making it harder to distinguish the two columns. In addition, formatting is compromised when people open the newsletter in Outlook and in Lotus Notes due to Constant Contact's software incompatibility. Unfortunately, our survey results show that only 8% open it in a Web browser, where the original design is visible. The views through Outlook and Lotus Notes wrap and break text in unusual ways, creating a layout mess. Our survey write-in responses reflect that.
- **Name change:** We came up with the initial name of the newsletter, *Measurement Matters*, based on the title for a workshop Angela conducted for Melcrum in the UK. Melcrum had no objection to our using the same title for the newsletter. We also conducted a search with the US Patent and Trademark Office and a similar UK agency to ensure no other publication was using that name in the communication field. There was no apparent conflict. However, after several issues had been distributed, we were alerted that Metrica has a blog by that name. Even though we could have legally continued to use the name, we did not want to confuse anyone and so changed the name to *Measurement Works* starting with the November 2011 issue.
- **Cultural differences.** With a large non-US readership, we refer to many concepts multiple ways to make the writing more international: team briefings/staff meetings; tick marks/check marks; lay-offs/redundancies.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes

For measures, Sinickas Communications uses surveys, online usage statistics, and analysis of the sources of leads and their revenue impact. We used SurveyMonkey.com to survey the 3,929 contacts we had as of March 1 (6% margin of error in the results) instead of the polling tool within Constant Contact because it's a better research methodology not to put a survey into the same channel being assessed. This approach identified, as we expected, that many people on our contact list are not receiving the

newsletter due to blockage of the Constant Contact domain on their companies' email platforms. For example, 20% of respondents said that they had never seen a single issue of the newsletter even though the mailing list for the newsletter and the survey are identical. We suspect the total number may be even higher since many companies block both Constant Contact and SurveyMonkey.

Metrics	Objectives	Results
1a. Make measurement easy to understand		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum reading grade level of newsletter Survey % of those not already measuring who say newsletter inspires them to want to try it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16.0 or less (bachelor's degree) at least 67% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11.7 for latest 3 issues (9.7, 12.1 and 13.5) 79%
1b. Align content with stakeholder demographics (as measured by content analysis; results are in work sample)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stories mention external communication Stories limit mention of people/clients in the US 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at least 17% of stories mention external comms measurement no more than 69% mention US 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23% mentioned external only 7% mentioned US
1c. Be deemed useful by stakeholders		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Net % useful rating (from survey) Already used something they read from past issues overall (% from survey) Open rate higher than Constant Contact average for Marketing/Adv/PR industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at least 67% useful for those who have seen the newsletter at least 33% used something at least 13.25% open rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 94% useful 38% used something from just the February issue within the last month open rate ranged from 16.4% to 29.2% for the last three months, with an average of 20.2%; overall for all 15 issues is 18.9% (which is 43% better than the Constant Contact average)
2a. Immediate financial return	200% ROI from newsletter: (gain-cost) ÷ cost	558% ROI: (\$86,903* - \$13,200) ÷ \$13,200
2b. Long-term financial return: influence stakeholders who have a budget but have not yet worked with us to be more likely to want to hire us due to the newsletter	67% of readers who fit the criteria would now be more likely or much more likely to want to work with us	74% net more likely

***2a. Immediate financial return:** Based on gmail correspondence, new revenue directly attributable to the 15 issues of the newsletter since 2011 was \$86,903 from three projects (a communication survey, focus group guides and database norms) and nine workshops for companies or organizations in six countries outside the US). In addition, a former client from Northern Ireland is currently in contact through our gmail account to set up workshops there in 2013 while I'm already in Europe, which he became aware of by reading the list of upcoming speaking engagements in the newsletter.

