

Recent Marketing Research Projects

While many people know us as experts in employee communication research, we've also provided clients with insightful and actionable research about their PR and marketing communications. Here are some summaries of what we've done recently. For client confidentiality, we've used generic names for each company.

Financial Services Firm (aka FSF)

"FSF," a business-to-business company with annual revenues of just under \$5 billion, is headquartered in Europe with clients in 150 countries. The corporate communication function manages a wide variety of marketing communications and PR materials and events, though access to most of these communications is controlled by local sales managers. The communicators had heard a great deal of anecdotal feedback from clients at events about the value of the communications, but had also heard sales managers sound less confident about the value of the materials. The only way to identify the true value of the materials in supporting sales and strengthening the brand was to conduct direct research with clients.

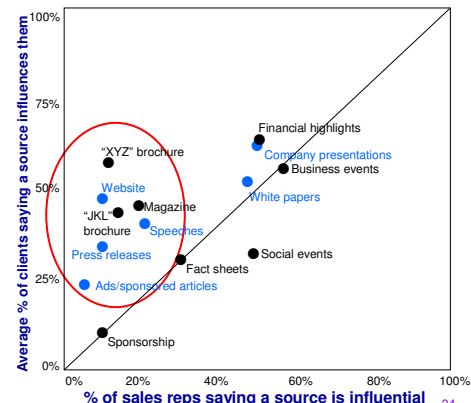
Methodology: Due to the relatively small number of customers in even such a large company in a B2B industry, an online or paper survey was likely to result in a smaller response than needed for the data to have the statistical validity required to demonstrate the value of the communications to skeptical sales managers. In addition, the communicators also wanted to hear verbatim comments on how materials and events could be improved. The final approach selected was to conduct telephone interviews with clients who had agreed in advance to scheduled interviews in one of four languages.

In addition, we conducted an internal survey with the sales managers on some questions that were similar to those asked of clients, as well as unique questions on how and when they use the Marcom materials.

Results: We learned where FSF ranked among its competitors on communication overall, as well as head-to-head on each specific type of communication. We learned what was valued most in competitors' materials and what could be improved in FSF's own communications—from content to distribution. Some of the key learnings were the role different materials played in influencing six different stages of the sales process.

Comparing clients' vs. sales reps' perceptions of how much influence communication had in the sales process

- Sales reps seem to **overestimate** the usefulness of social events, compared to how much influence clients say social events have on them.
- Sales reps are strongly **underestimating** how useful several key communications may be for them based on how influential clients say these communications are:
 - Two marketing brochures
 - Website
 - Client newsletter
 - Industry speeches
 - Press releases
 - Ads



Comparing customer results to sales manager results showed which communications the managers under-valued and over-valued in relation to their actual influence with customers. We also learned that sales managers weren't clear on when to use different materials.

Outcomes: The findings were used to recommend changes in the 2009 budget, shifting resource allocations for greater value; for example, research showed that advertising in local industry publications had far more impact than ads in the international publications, and that online advertising wasn't even noticed. The results were used to convince management that some of the communications should be distributed more centrally, with local discretion retained on other materials. Many specific changes have been made in the content of brochures and newsletters, and in the types and locations of events, to better meet the needs of clients. A task force of sales managers and communicators is developing a best practices recommendation for when and how different materials can be used most effectively during the sales cycle.

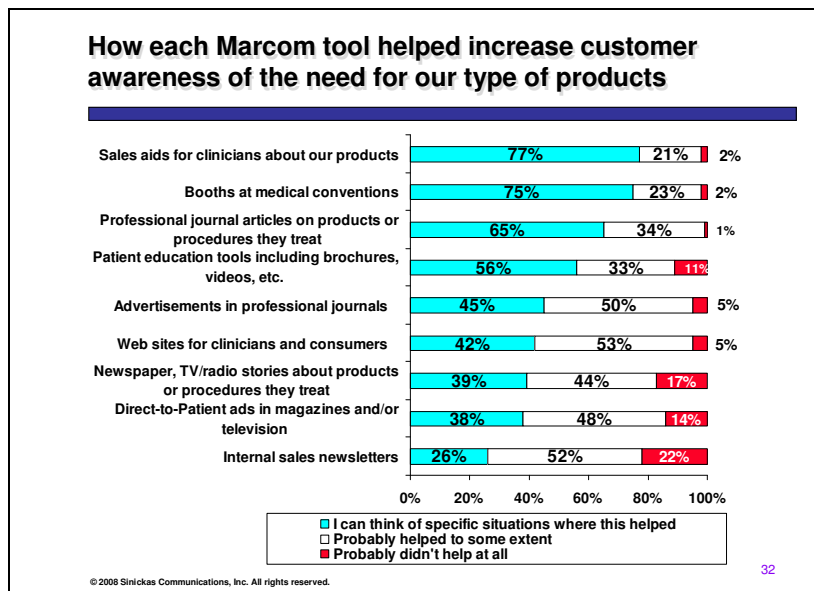
Global Medical Devices Company (aka GMDC)

This client, "GMDC," is a private operating company (with four business units of its own) that is part of a Fortune 100 company. The private company employs 9,000 people in 50 countries. The VP of Communications had arrived at the company about six months previously and found that while the communications appeared to be of very high quality, management had little sense of the financial value they brought to the sales process.

Methodology:

1. **Survey:** The customers of this company are physicians and hospital systems. Senior management didn't allow direct research with customers for this project, but we were allowed to conduct research with the sales staff. As a result, we asked sales people to report on their customers' reactions to the various Marcom and PR materials, not their own reactions. We asked sales people how much impact each communication had on each of the four key aspects of their sales process. They could choose among three options:

- They thought the communication had little or no impact on that aspect of the sales process.
- They believed the communication did have impact.
- They knew the communication had impact because customers had told them so through unsolicited feedback (as in, "The reason I called you is that I just read this article...." Or "The reason I'm choosing your company's product over your competitor's is the research I read on your website"). We also asked sales people how much credit for their total sales they attributed to the entire Marcom/PR support program.



2. **Retrospective pilot program:** We examined sales results in different markets where a celebrity was used to draw attention to a sensitive medical problem she had, which could be addressed by the client’s product if consumers asked their physicians to prescribe it.

Results:

1. The survey data showed the variable mix the different communications played in each stage of the sales process. Looking at the same data another way, they showed for each communication element in which stage of the sales process it added the most value. Also, the VP was able to calculate the ROI of the entire comms program based on the credit attributed from sales staff to the program as a percentage of revenue vs. the cost of the comms program and infrastructure.

2. Sales results in the pilot markets far exceeded average sales in the markets in which the celebrity did not appear, but communicators didn’t realize that until we did the research.

Outcomes: Seeing where different communications made the biggest difference (creating awareness of a need for a product vs. closing a sale, for example) allowed the communicators to adjust the content of different materials and have little problem with the approval process because the research justified the changes in business terms. Also, because of the extremely high ROI that was calculated, the VP of Comms had little difficulty in getting a significant budget increase the following year to do more of the communications and to expand the celebrity spokesperson campaign.

Laboratory Equipment Company (aka LEC)

This US-based client, “LEC,” is a \$3 billion global B2B company in the Fortune 1000.

Methodology: We were hired to review existing customer research and suggest enhancements. A month later, we were asked to develop a survey to evaluate their customer magazine and the role it plays in the sales process. A year later, we were hired to develop a survey to be used with potential customers who visit their booth at industry trade shows.

Results and Outcomes: Unknown since the client conducted the survey in-house. It must have been effective, though since we were asked to develop a second customer survey on a different communication channel.

| LEC Post-Clinical Lab Expo Survey | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| How well did our booth meet your needs? | | | | |
| <i>If a statement does not apply to you, just skip the question.</i> | | | | |
| | Strongly Disagree | | Strongly Agree | |
| 1. Visiting the LEC Booth helped me make more informed purchasing decisions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Visiting the LEC Booth made me more likely to want our lab to purchase LEC products. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Information I received about the LEC booth before the show encouraged me to stop by. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I stopped by the LEC booth to see one or more specific products I am interested in. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I learned about new LEC products for the first time when I visited the booth. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Travel Services Company (aka TSC)

The travel division of a global Fortune 100 company, “TSC,” hired us to examine what they were already measuring in customer communications, event management, media relations and internal communication so that we could recommend further or enhanced measurements.

Methodology: In-depth interviews with communicators and review of existing research data.

Results: We found that the customer data base being kept by the sales department included a great deal of information that could be of use to the communicators that they had been unaware of. Importing information the communicators had been gathering by client into the data base allowed further correlations connecting exposure to different communications with various measures of sales success (year-over-year increases, expansion into additional lines of business, etc.).

Outcomes: Unknown since the project was only to identify additional research value, not to actually conduct any further research.

Other External Stakeholder Research Projects

- We conducted focus groups for a large, Midwestern US retirement community with current residents, potential future residents in various age groups, adult children of residents, local people who used the services of the community without living in it, and community leaders in a position to recommend it. The focus groups tested the marketability of projected changes.
- For a government contractor, we quantified how much communication was being sent to all key stakeholder groups, how effectively senior management thought those groups’ needs were being met, and how much time and money was being used to achieve those results.
- We conducted interviews with journalists for a major insurance client to identify how well the client’s media relations staff were working with the media in comparison to its competitors’ PR staffs.
- For a Fortune 100 company, we evaluated the different approaches to measuring news coverage being used in their three geographic regions. We recommended a single template to be used by all three firms doing the measurement so that the corporate office could actually see their overall global coverage in a meaningful way and compare the regions (and their agencies) against each other.

