

How to Become a Measurement Maven

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The traditional approach to professional development is to read books and attend conferences. That also works well for learning about communication measurement, but there are some additional, lowercost options to consider too.

Traditional resources

A number of professional associations and communication firms offer conferences, manuals, articles and book chapters on communication measurement. (For example, euprera.org, globalpr.org, instituteforpr.com, melcрум.com, pria.com.au, prsa.org and sinicom.com.) However, some of these Web sites don't show all the measurement resources available in one place, even when you conduct a search of their sites using the words you might typically think of. I'd recommend visiting their sites and calling to ask about every resource they have on research or measurement.

If you live near a university, you may find classes and textbooks available on qualitative and quantitative social research methodologies. A number of professional journals focus on communication research. While some are available only by subscription, others offer some free articles or abstracts online (for example, erlbaum.com and thegaug.com).

No-cost training resources

Here are some creative ideas for learning more about research using free resources:

- Agree to take every telemarketer's survey. Fill out evaluation forms at hotels and restaurants. Take notes on how you react to the questions or the

response scales.

- Study newspapers and magazines for creative ways to present quantitative data. One of the best is *USA Today*. Also notice when a bar chart or other illustration of data doesn't make sense. Determine what could make the information more clear: A better headline? A label for each axis? A legend? A different scale?

- If your organization hires consultants to conduct research, offer to be their liaison. Ask them to define the terminology they use. Volunteer to be a note-taker in focus groups, and observe the techniques of different facilitators. Then ask the consultants about how and why they do their research the way they do, and what other options they considered but didn't use — and why.

- Volunteer to be a communication contest judge and study the measurement sections of the entries and the supporting documentation they provide.

- Volunteer to help a professional association or community group conduct a survey.

- Examine survey and focus group reports conducted over the years for your department or other departments. Study what they have in common, what's good and what is confusing. Take several survey questions and study them chronologically from the survey instrument, to the raw data report, to the interpretive report. Pay attention to which numbers were used and which were not. Notice how those results were put into context with other numbers in the report, especially in comparison with a normative database or against past years' results.

Finally, you can surf the Web for information. Many sites provide in-

formation only to clients or subscribers, but there are several that provide useful information for free.

For example:

- **casro.org** — look for the code of standards and ethics for survey research and Q&A on "Surveys and You."

- **communicationresearch.org** — look for the "Research Methodologies" section, but be warned, this is not for beginners.

- **instituteforPR.com** — look for a dictionary of research terminology (PDF file). The "Research" tab also has reprints of many articles on research, including a bibliography of key research papers.

- **surveysystem.com** — look for a survey size calculator, along with explanations of related terms, such as confidence interval and level, significance, etc. In addition, look for discussion of survey design issues and how to do correlations.

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