

Don't try measurement – unless you're keen to win senior management's respect or prove your value

FIVE GOOD REASONS *NOT* TO MEASURE

Most of these columns try to convince communicators about the importance of conducting research and provide examples of how it can be used. But are there times when practitioners should avoid measurement? Angela Sinickas provides five reasons why measurement might *not* apply to you.

1. Your boss already knows the value of communication. You may be one of the fortunate few whose management team intuitively understands how important communication is to your organization's success. You don't need to do any measurement to get the budgets you want or the promotions you deserve.

Just hope that your management team never changes and your good boss doesn't get replaced with a bad one who thinks communication is just an overhead cost that needs to be trimmed.

2. Measurement may force you to change jobs. I first began measuring communication seven years into my career when I was editor of the *Little Trib*, the Chicago Tribune Company's monthly employee magazine. Within months of conducting a communication audit that led to major changes in communication that better supported the company's business goals, I was named to the newly created position of Internal Communication Manager. Within a year my staff was increased from one part-time intern to three full-time professionals – during the recession of the early 1980s.

So, if you really enjoy those brainstorming sessions with the graphic designers and would hate

to give them up for strategy meetings with executives, stay away from measurement.

3. Research takes too much time. If you conduct interviews or focus groups with your target audience before developing a communication plan, or to pre-test a near-final draft of your communication, you may have to build an extra day or two into your schedule.

Of course, results of the pre-planning research can also completely change your expected approach into one that is simpler and takes far less of your time.

Research showed my management team that a financial literacy campaign they wanted me to create wasn't likely to get them the productivity improvements they wanted from employees, whereas a simple five-minute discussion in staff meetings that never even mentioned money did.

Pre-testing an e-mail announcing a major benefit change for one of my manufacturing clients led to several dozen last-minute edits that avoided major misunderstandings.

Not only did the communicators save the time it would have taken to send out explanatory follow-up communications correcting the misperceptions, but the HR department received fewer than five phone calls the next day about the change when they were expecting over 500 calls based on previous announcements of benefit changes.


4. It's too expensive. Focus groups and a survey cost one client US\$60,000. But just one of the recommendations suggested by the research saved the company US\$100,000 a year while making their audio-visual communications more targeted and effective.

A US\$50,000 survey for a

pharmaceutical company helped the communicators calculate that just one communication campaign they worked on in the previous year had led to a nearly 2,000 percent return on investment, based on the division's entire communication cost for the year. One outcome was that senior management tripled the division's communication budget for the next year.

A final example of the "high" cost of research comes from Corby Casler – a speaker I heard at a conference, who related that whenever she conducted measurements showing the impact of her communications on operational results, her management wanted more communication and more measurement. By the time she left for a bigger job at another company, her measurement budget alone was larger than her entire communication budget had been just a few years earlier.

5. Measurement is addictive. Sure, the first time you measure it might be due to peer pressure. Everyone else is measuring so you want to get in on the action too. At first, you just mean to be a recreational measurer. Next thing you know, you're getting high on the management attention your research generates. Before you realize it, you're hooked. You can't write a single paragraph without your research crutch.

The final stage is when you spend all your time measuring and strategizing, and your organization has to hire staff for you to implement all the measurable, bottom-line-impacting plans you develop. Although there are rumors of clinics specializing in measurement addiction, wouldn't it be better to just say no and never start in the first place? 



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