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changing the way business communicates

NO-COST, NO-PERMISSION MEASUREMENT



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Most of us spend nearly all our time and energy executing communications, and relatively little on measuring the effectiveness of our work. Even if we want to conduct some measurements, it may be hard to get extra budget money or permission from upper management to conduct focus groups or surveys.

Before you try to obtain resources for these "audience-invasive" evaluation techniques, you might want to first try some of the following no-cost, no-permission-needed measurements.

Readability

- Calculate the grade level of your writing, or of rewrites from reviewers, to demonstrate that your communications are geared to the reading level of your target audience. Most word processing software offers this option. For example, in Microsoft Word, pull down the Tools menu and perform the grammar check; the program

will give you the reading grade level.

Distribution

- Send documents being distributed through E-mail, "receipt requested". Then track which recipients opened the E-mail on which dates.
- For print, video or face-to face communications, call people at the bottom of the organization chart in each of your organization's locations. Ask them when they received a particular communication that should have reached them about a week earlier. Ask them how it was distributed: in a personal mailbox, in a box on the floor near the time clock, posted on a bulletin board, in a staff meeting, etc. Keep track of the responses by location. Repeat this at least twice a year for each different medium you distribute: publications, video newsmagazines, job postings, a memos etc. You will probably be unpleasantly surprised and need to take follow-up action.

Intended audience penetration

- Create a matrix listing each element in your communication program down the left side and each audience subgroup across the top. Organize the subgroups in a meaningful sequence; for example, for internal audiences list them from groups of executives to line employees. Then put an X in each "cell" where a particular medium is intended to reach that subgroup. Very few communication channels may be available to the majority of

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IABC in Australia

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employees, yet executives perceive that most of what they see or hear is available to the entire company.

Content analysis

- Create a matrix, listing in the left-hand column all the messages your communications should be reinforcing: the key elements of our mission, our annual goals, our corporate values, specific new programs. Then examine each issue of every regular publication and measure the number of column centimeters (including photos and headlines) that have addressed each key message. (Or use a check mark for each article if you don't need to be that quantitative.)
- Record whether each division or location is receiving a balanced amount of coverage.
- Add up the number of centimeters for reactive stories on events versus proactive articles preparing employees for change.
- Count the number of times employees are quoted in stories versus executives.

Looking back on past issues you may find that some objectives or programs have not been covered extensively enough to reinforce

their importance. Content analysis also acts as a planning guide for future issues to keep you focused on communications that support your company's objectives.

Overall average scores

- Evaluate each item as if it were an entry in a communication contest, using at least two objective colleagues who had no hand in creating the materials. Determine which aspects of communication are important to be measured; for example, writing accuracy, brevity, clarity, organization, effective use of graphics, consistency with corporate graphic standards and with each other.
- Score items numerically using a seven-point evaluation scale: start with "4" for satisfactory and up to "7" for excellent or "1" for poor. Enter all scores on a spreadsheet and calculate the averages at the bottom of columns for each channel and across rows for each criterion you're measuring.

Also enter the following information for each item:

- date it was first issued
- average reading grade-level score
- department/organizational level

- issuing the communication
- frequency (weekly, quarterly, annually).
- Once all this information and the scores are entered on the spreadsheet, you can use the "sort" function on various rows and columns to check for trends. For example, sort by grade level and see if the easiest-to-read materials come from certain departments or levels and difficult ones from others. You may notice when you sort by "date issued" that certain times of the year are overloaded with communication.

Memos, E-mail and voicemail

- Create a matrix with criteria in the left-hand column defining the general strengths and weaknesses of the medium. Next, evaluate each item in the category you are assessing over a period of time; for example, the all-employee e-mails sent out during a single week. Finally, add up all the check marks for each criterion.

Memos are often too long and rambling, and the action required is unclear to the reader.

Voicemail is often used inappropriately for subjects that should be documented on paper or in person.

Media mix

- Create a matrix with the names of your major communication channels in the first column, then set up the rest of the columns as illustrated below. Use Xs in the columns that best describe the characteristics of each medium. The overall mix of your program

should show balance within each category of criteria. If it doesn't balance, use this matrix to plan how you can add new media to your mix or change an existing medium to incorporate new characteristics.

TYPE OF MEDIUM				DIRECTION OF MEDIUM			SPEED/FREQUENCY OF MEDIUM			
Print	Face-to-face	Audio-visual	Electronic	Top-down	Upward	Horizontal	Same day	Within 1 week	From 1 week to 1 mo.	Over 1 month