

Telling the story behind the figures requires knowing how to gather the facts and analyze the findings

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RESEARCH

As communicators progress up their career paths, they're faced with higher expectations in terms of their understanding of the role of research and measurement in communication campaigns. This month's column of R:M:E covers what communicators at different stages in their careers should know about measurement, and where they can find the information they need to know.

What communicators should know about research depends partly on their level within their organizations and partly on the type of jobs they have. The following list can be used first for self-assessment, and then as a development guide. As communicators progress upward, they should have mastered all the research skills and knowledge of the previous levels.

Expert tacticians

Communicators starting out will need to work towards acquiring these skills:

- How to identify a client's real objectives for requesting the communicator's assistance and what role the communication will play in advancing some business objective.
- How to conduct secondary research (reviewing the relevant results of previous surveys and focus groups conducted by your own company and knowing where to find statistics related to communication effectiveness from professional organizations, textbooks or the Web).
- How to use observational

measurements that don't require permission, audience involvement, or budget, such as readability of writing, content analysis, accuracy of media coverage.

- How to conduct a readership/viewership survey.
- How to use research reports (Web usage, media clip analysis, communication audits) to track the impact of changes you make in communication against changes in those research findings.
- How to be a note-taker in focus group sessions.

Mid-level managers

For every campaign being managed, communication managers should have a good grasp of the following:

- How to conduct a stakeholder analysis, which may involve primary and secondary research.
- How to set measurable objectives with clients on behaviors to be changed, the knowledge and attitude messages that will influence those behaviors, and the selection of channels that are most suited to those messages and the target audiences.
- How to conduct usability testing on Web or intranet sites.
- How to design good focus group discussion guides; how to facilitate focus groups; how to report results from focus groups in ways that focus management's decisions and actions on the key findings.
- The underlying concepts of good survey development, administration and reporting.

How to draft questions that will provide actionable data, ask only one item per question and avoid words with multiple interpretations; how to ask the appropriate number and type of demographic questions.

- How to draft the right range of response scales for different types of questions: how many points on the scale (2, 4, 5, 7, 10); should there be a neutral point; should the scales focus on satisfaction (agree/disagree), evaluation (excellent/poor), frequency of observed behaviors (almost always/almost never); or a unique set of multiple-choice responses.
- Understanding enough about statistics to work effectively with a market researcher or organization development staffer on survey administration issues. The communicator should be able to decide whether to survey an entire group or to pick a random sample; appropriate sizes of random samples; how to maximize response rates to surveys; how to protect the confidentiality of respondents; what it means that a survey's results are accurate "to a 95% confidence level, plus or minus X%."
- How to interpret the raw data from a survey report: understanding net favorable responses; the difference in what you learn from net favorable percentages versus mean scores; which demographic differences will be meaningful for subgroups of various sizes.
- How to report survey findings in graphic ways; how to find the "stories" in the numbers.



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Communication executives

At this level, practitioners' knowledge should extend to:

- How to develop and manage a full spectrum of measurements on an ongoing basis and knowing how to use these during review meetings with other executives.
- How to recommend and conduct key stakeholder research when other executives are considering options in decision-making.
- Understanding the concepts involved in designing surveys and examining their findings

for higher-level analysis. How to quantify statistical correlations and how to set up research so that correlations can be found between research findings for internal and external audiences.

- How to connect communication outputs and outcomes with business results. How and when to set up pilot and control groups; how to plan communication programs up-front in a way that you can calculate the return on investment (ROI) after the communication succeeds in

reaching its strategic business objectives.

Where to learn more about these skills

To learn more about these skills, there are a number of books, manuals and reports on research techniques available from Melcrum, IABC, PRSA and other similar communication resources. On surveys, I recommend a book called *Organizational Surveys*, which is easily understandable by the non-statistician.

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A summary of research skills needed at each level of practice

Expert Tacticians	Mid-level Managers	Communication Executives
<p>Identify objectives for requesting the communicator's assistance and what role communication will play in advancing business objectives.</p> <p>Conduct secondary research.</p> <p>Use "observational" measurements that don't require permission, audience involvement, or budget; these include such things as readability of writing, content analysis, and accuracy of media coverage.</p> <p>Conduct a readership/viewership survey.</p> <p>Use research reports to track the impact of the organization's communication changes against the results in those research findings.</p> <p>Serve as a note-taker in focus group sessions.</p>	<p>Conduct a stakeholder analysis, which may involve primary and secondary research.</p> <p>Set measurable objectives on behaviors to be changed; craft the knowledge and attitude messages that will influence those behaviors; select the channels that are most suited to those messages and the target audiences.</p> <p>Conduct usability testing on Web or intranet sites.</p> <p>Design, facilitate and report on the results of focus groups.</p> <p>Grasp the underlying concepts of good survey development, administration and reporting.</p> <p>Determine the right range of response scales for different types of questions.</p> <p>Understand enough about statistics to work effectively with a market researcher or organization development staffer on survey administration issues.</p> <p>Interpret the raw data from a survey</p>	<p>Develop and manage a full spectrum of measurements on an ongoing basis and know how to use these during review meetings with executives.</p> <p>Recommend and conduct key stakeholder research when other executives are considering options in decision-making.</p> <p>Understand the concepts involved in designing surveys and examining their findings for higher-level analysis: how to quantify statistical correlations; how to set up research so that correlations can be found between research findings for internal and external audiences.</p> <p>Connect communication outputs and outcomes with business results: how and when to set up pilot and control groups; how to plan communication programs up-front in a way that you can calculate the return on investment (ROI) after the communication succeeds in reaching its business objectives.</p>

