

Give executives the metrics they want, but slip in the performance measures they actually need

GIVING LEADERS THE NUMBERS THEY NEED

Senior executives may have strong ideas about the kind of communication metrics they want but often they're not seeing the bigger picture. Angela Sinickas suggests practitioners focus on the right performance metrics and then teach their leaders how to appreciate them.

Angela Sinickas' *Research, Measurement, Evaluation* column in SCM has won an award for Excellence in the IABC Gold Quill Awards 2005. This is the third time the column has been recognized in the Gold Quill Awards.

Executives can be stubborn about having you measure what they want, even if it may not help them reach their objectives. For example, one public affairs department was told to double the output of their news releases as a measure of increased effectiveness. Another communication department was told to conduct a benchmarking study to compare staffing levels and budgets with similar companies.

Communicators can ignore these requests at their professional peril. I recommend giving executives what they want, but slipping in measures of what they actually *need* at the same time – without asking for permission. The most effective way to get your boss to see your point of view is to provide the right performance metrics along with their requested ones.

Measure results with activities

Executives often mistakenly focus on measuring our activities – like the number of news releases, web pages or newsletter articles we generate – because these are tangibles that can be counted accurately. But we should be measuring more meaningful outcomes to present along with the activity counts. For example:

- On an existing employee or customer survey, add a few questions on which

communications they were exposed to. Then calculate the results of all the other survey questions in two “buckets”: those who were exposed vs. those who weren't. You may find that those who remember reading news coverage about your organization have spent more money on your products than those who haven't.

- Compare actual outcomes in different parts of your workforce or customer base against variations in the communications they were exposed to by virtue of their location. For instance, a metropolitan waste agency measured variations in how many people brought used car batteries or engine oil to their toxic waste dump based on whether their local community newspaper carried just ads about the topic, just news stories, a combination of both, or neither. You may find that employees who enrolled in a particular benefit-plan option at higher levels work in locations that offered a meeting on the topic, while those who were less likely to enroll relied only on a brochure and website.
- Quantify the impact of other activities that *you* think are more valuable than the ones executives care about. In the news release example above, you might also track the amount of time spent on the phone or in person with reporters at different media – and compare the success of article placement vs. time spent with them. This could show that the time spent researching and writing more releases would be more productively spent in personal contact following up on fewer releases.

Measuring efficiency

Senior leaders often commission benchmarking studies to make sure their communication groups aren't overstaffed or wasting budget. It's useless to fight this, but it's imperative to gather metrics of effectiveness as well as efficiency.

This proved invaluable to one client when it turned out that several of their communication functions either spent more money or employed more people than most of their competition. However, there were no staff or budget cuts when we showed the following outcome results along with the efficiency metrics:

- A telephone survey of reporters showed that the client's media relations staff was rated far more highly on their working relationship and responsiveness than their competitors. Follow-up questions showed that this led to reporters being more likely to call our client when they were doing industry round-up stories that put companies in a positive light.
- A comparison of internal communication survey results showed that employees scored well above database norms on how well informed they were on key business topics and how useful they said key vehicles were in helping them do their jobs. The client even set several new highs in the database.
- The customer magazine, though expensive to produce, was cited as the primary reason customers purchased additional products and services from the company, which they otherwise wouldn't have known about.

So go ahead and make your leaders happy, but be sure to help make them successful as well. [scm](http://www.scm.com)



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