

Winner of IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence, 2005

Entrant's Name: Angela D. Sinickas, ABC
Title of Entry: **SCM Column on Communication Measurement**
Division/Category/Subcategory: Communication Skills/Division 2/Category 18.2
Entrant's Organization: Sinickas Communications, Inc. (SCI)
Time Period of Project: January-December, 2004
Brief Description: A recurring column in the Melcrum publication *Strategic Communication Management* to help communicators build measurement into all they do, from tactical communications to strategic plans. The goal is to provide practical tips to make communicators more successful.

Need/Opportunity

Audience needs: Communicators are now being expected to prove the value of their functions to their leadership teams, just as every other business function does. However, a number of barriers have made it difficult for communicators to do this effectively: lack of knowledge, lack of budget, lack of staff and, sometimes, an aversion to numbers. Having experienced first-hand the power of communication measurement to increase an employee communication budget and staff size (during the recession of the early 1980s), I have become a missionary trying to convert communicators to not only conduct measurements, but to get excited about doing it.

My business needs: I decided to make communication measurement a major element of the consulting firm I opened in June 2000. My need is to manage a financially successful business, making myself known to prospective clients and having them think of me when they need help with a measurement project. In a 2002 survey I conducted, 70% of clients who had read my column said it influenced their decision to hire us. In 2003, 63% of clients said the column influenced their decision. Another 25% said it reminded them to consider us for new projects. This potential revenue impact is why I have written a column for various Melcrum publications for seven years.

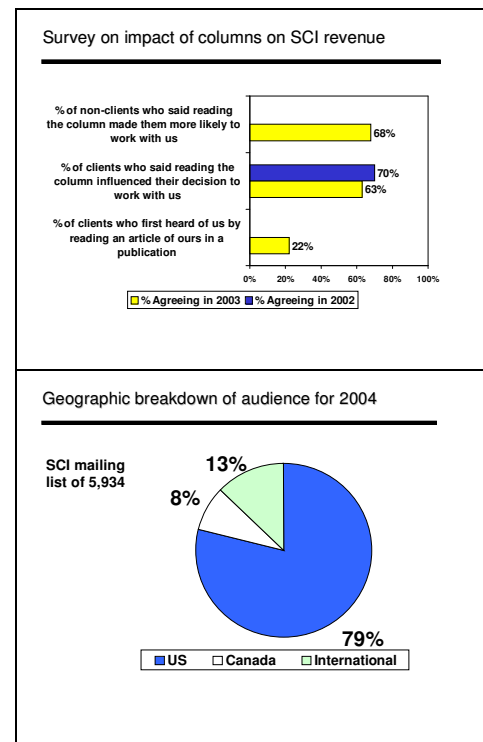
Intended Audience(s)

Primary audience: The subscribers of *Strategic Communication Management (SCM)* are the primary audience. Mandy Thatcher, editor of SCM, describes the audience as follows:

"Our readership is around 5,000 communication professionals. We have subscribers in over 80 countries, with the largest portion of readers based in the US, UK and rest of Europe. Around 70% of our readers have been in corporate comms for 10 years or longer. Around the same percentage hold the position of communication manager through to director, VP or head of corporate comms."

I target the column to the 70% of experienced communicators, especially those in large corporations or government units at manager level or above. These are my potential clients.

Secondary audience: The 5,934 corporate communication professionals on the SCI reprint mailing list. Geographical dispersion of my mailing list is reflected above. All regions are in my target group because Sinickas Communications, Inc. (SCI) also sells a number of "products" that are easy to purchase around the world and don't require a local consultant. Most of these



individuals are highly motivated about communication measurement because they have either been a client or have asked to receive my copyrighted reprints by either:

- Giving me their business card at the end of speeches and workshops I present.
- Requesting to be put on the reprint list when they visit my web site, www.SiniCom.com.
- Returning the reply card in my capabilities brochure.

Goals/Objectives

- 1. Use the column to help generate revenue by building the reputation of Sinickas Communications, Inc. as the pre-eminent consulting firm for measuring the effectiveness of employee communication.** As mentioned above, two years of research told us my column directly affects the financial success of our business. Our goals were to:
 - a.** Obtain at least 50% of our consulting revenue from projects where no competitive bidding was required because the client perceived us to be the only or the best partner for the project due to our reputation. This saves us very valuable time.
 - b.** To win more than 33% of competitively bid proposals (all but one of our 2004 bid processes involved at least three vendors). This would show that reputation helped beat the typical odds of winning since our costs may be higher than our competitors'.
- 2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners and the SCM publishers, as measured in several ways:**
 - a.** Write the column to be understandable by the average communicator (most of whom have college degrees, and virtually all of whom finished secondary schools). This translates to a Flesch-Kincaid grade level readability score of under 13.0, which would be appropriate for a university freshman.
 - b.** Achieve at least a 67% favorable rating for the column on a readership survey conducted annually by the publishers of SCM. (Typically, survey results that are 67% favorable are considered at "strength level"; below 50% is considered a weakness.)

Solution Overview

I have been a columnist for various Melcrom Publishing, Ltd. communication journals since 1998, so I didn't need to convince them to give me the opportunity to write a column in 2004. The editors typically e-mailed me several weeks in advance of a deadline to discuss the theme for the next issue. I would suggest potential topics for my column and the editors might tweak them or tell me to just go ahead. Then I would write the column, trying to provide intriguing information that communicators can put to practical use in their jobs. On occasion, I also let in some humor (see the last column on "good" reasons not to measure, especially the last reason) because I find in workshops I conduct that humor often helps people internalize important concepts. I then e-mailed my drafts to the editors, generally at the very last minute before their deadline. The editors did very little editing and sent me PDF files for final approval.

I expand on the visibility the column receives, especially in the U.S. (see comparison by geography under "Intended Audiences"), by periodically sending reprints of selected columns, for which I retain the copyright, to the 5,934 corporate communicators on my mailing list who are already interested in measurement, as well as editors of other communication publications. Articles for which I own the copyright are also posted on my www.SiniCom.com Web site. I also check online readership of different articles monthly to see which topics are most popular.

Implementation and Challenges

- **Limited space.** I try to write concisely, with heavy use of bullets and graphics to maximize the amount of valuable tips I can share within the restrictions of an 800-word allotment (sometimes increased to 1,600 words).

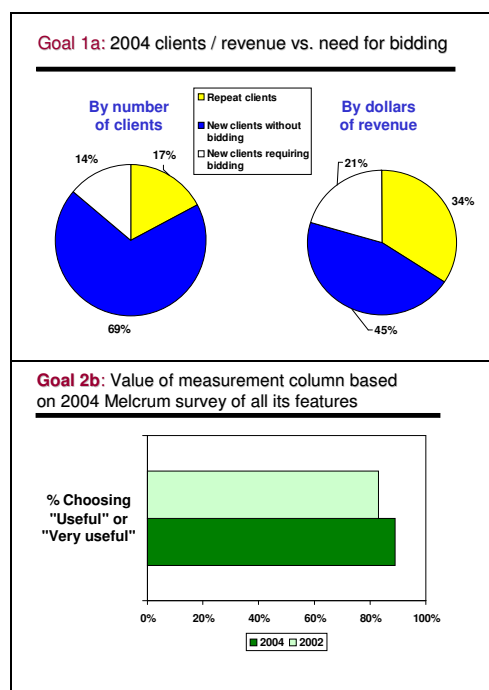
- **Lack of time.** Due to a heavy schedule, the column was often written during late hours shortly before the deadline.
- **Budget.** \$0.00. There is none. I write the column for free.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes

For measures, Sinickas Communications and Melcrum use surveys. SCI also analyzes our revenue and Web site usage statistics. We used SurveyMonkey.com to conduct a survey of past clients and a random sample of 919 contacts on our mailing list to identify the connection between column readership and its impact on generating revenue.

1. Use the column to help generate revenue:

- Obtained 86% of all consulting revenue without competitive bidding. Among new clients alone, obtained 84% of new clients (21/25) and 69% of revenue from new-client projects without bidding (goal of 50%).
- Won 67% of the six competitively bid proposals (goal of 33%).
- We had an additional financial outcome for which we had not set a goal. One new client in 2003 told us they first heard of us by reading the column. On the strength of that article, followed by a review of our Web site, they invited us to participate in a 6-firm bidding process. We won. The \$158,700 of revenue from this client in 2003-2004 represents a 130% return on investment on all the time spent writing seven years' worth of columns, calculated using my billing rate: $(\$158,700 - \$69,000) / \$69,000$.



2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners:

- Understandability:** Because Microsoft Word's readability program has a flaw preventing it from showing a score over grade 12.0, I used a Flesch-Kincaid program from jack.gravco.com to determine the grade level scores on the three submitted columns as 12.04, 12.07 and 12.58 (average of 12.23). (Our goal was to be under the 13.0 level.)
- Melcrum's November 2004 readership survey found that 89% of SCM readers said my column is either useful or very useful. Two years ago that number was 86%. This is considerably higher than what is considered a "strength" level on a survey of 67%. Here is a representative, unsolicited write-in comment from the survey: "Range of topics/areas of substance covered. Angela Sinickas always useful to read." Editor Mandy Thatcher's evaluation of the column is as follows:

"According to our customer research, measurement remains a key issue for professional communicators, and an area where practitioners are always on the look out for guidance. Angela's regular column - Research, Measurement, Evaluation - responds to this demand by providing succinct and articulate tips, ideas and information to help practitioners tackle some of the measurement challenges they face in their organizations. I believe the key to the column's continued success is its simplicity and practicality. It addresses common problems, explores topical issues, and dissects some of the myths and red herrings that arise around this subject."