

Entrant's Name: Angela D. Sinickas, ABC
Organization's Name: Sinickas Communications, Inc.
Category/Division/Subdivision: Communication Skills/Division 17/Subdivision 17.2
Title of Entry: **SCM Column on Communication Measurement**
Time Period of Project: January-December, 2002
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.

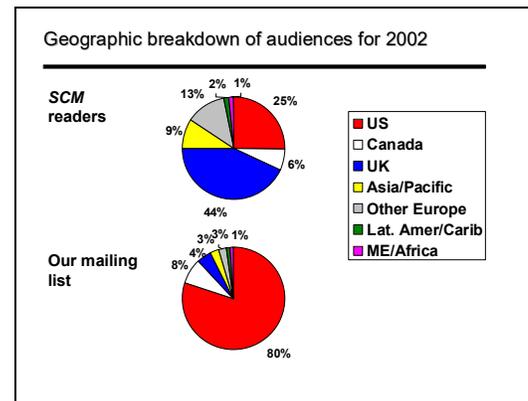
Need/Opportunity

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 personally experienced first-hand the power of communication measurement to increase an employee communication budget and staff size (during the early 1980s, another recessionary period), 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 survey I conducted in 2002 with my 2001 clients, 70% of those who had read my column said it influenced their decision to work with us. The next year, 63% of my 2002 clients said the column influenced their decision. Another 25% said it reminded them to consider us for new projects. This potential impact on revenue is why I have written a column for various Melcrum publications for five years.

Intended Audience(s)

Primary audience: The subscribers of *Strategic Communication Management (SCM)* are the primary audience. Although subscribers' job levels, job types and experience levels vary, I target the column to experienced communicators in large corporations holding a title of manager or above. These are my potential clients. Geographical dispersion of SCM readers around the world is reflected at right. 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.



Secondary audience: The 4,076 corporate communication professionals on the SCI reprint mailing list. 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, our research told us my column directly affects the financial success of my business. Our measurable 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 that can be better spent in other ways.
 - b. To win more than 33% of competitively bid proposals (most of our 2002 bid processes involved at least three vendors—and one involved six contenders), because this would indicate that reputation helped beat the typical odds of winning.
 - c. Have at least 50% of my 2002 clients who have read the column say that it influenced their decision to hire us or buy products from us, and have 50% of non-clients who have seen the column say it makes them more likely to want to work with us.
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 12.0.
 - b. Achieve at least a 67% favorable rating for the column on a readership survey conducted by the publishers of SCM in January-February 2003.
 - c. Have at least 25% of www.SiniCom.com visitors who look at the reprints section of the site open my columns. (Since there are 52 articles/columns posted there now, the random chance of any one column/article being opened is about 2%. Achieving a 25% view rate randomly would mean that all visitors to that part of the site open 13 articles.)

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 2002. The editors typically called me several weeks in advance of a deadline to discuss the other articles scheduled for publication. 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 table in the "Pitfalls" column) 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 4,076 corporate communicators on my mailing list who are already interested in measurement, as well as editors of other communication publications. Articles and columns for which I own the copyright are also posted on my www.SiniCom.com Web site.

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.

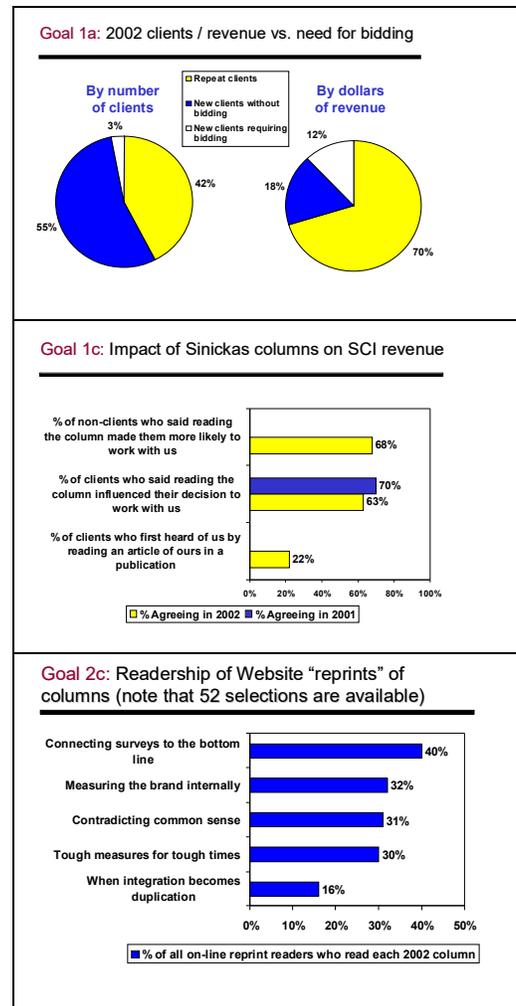
- **Lack of time.** Due to a heavy schedule, the column was often written during late hours shortly before the deadline.
- **Budget.** There is none. I write the column for free.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes

For measures, we use surveys and analyze our revenue and Web site usage statistics. We used SurveyMonkey.com to conduct a survey of 2002's clients and a random sample of 919 contacts on our mailing list. (See the tabbed section "Research Results" for full details.)

1. Use the column to help generate revenue:

- Obtained 88% of all consulting revenue without competitive bidding; among new clients alone, obtained 95% of new clients and 60% of revenue from new-client projects without bidding (goal of 50%).
- Won 50% of competitively bid proposals, but what we won represented 67% of available project money, so we won the biggest projects and lost some smaller ones to local consultants (goal of 33%).
- 63% of 2002 clients who read the column said it influenced their decision to hire us (goal of 50%). Another 25% said it reminded them to consider us for a project. In addition, 68% of non-client contacts from our mailing list said the column made them more likely to work with us in the future (goal of 50%).
- We had an additional financial outcome for which we had not set a goal. One new client that told us they first heard of us by reading the "Internal brand" column last year. 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 \$86,000 of revenue from this client in 2002 alone represents an 89% return on investment on all the time spent writing five years' worth of columns (calculated at my billing rate during those years).



2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners:

- Understandability:** Microsoft Word's readability program calculated the Flesch-Kincaid grade level scores on the three submitted columns as 11.1, 11.9 and 12.0 (average of 11.7). (Our goal was to be no higher than 12.0.)
- Though SCM's readership survey is still open, so far 86% of SCM readers said the column is either useful or very useful.
- Two of the columns included in this entry were read by 32% to 40% of visitors to the reprint section of my Web site. The "Pitfalls" column was printed in December 2002 and was not posted to the site until January 2003.