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Title of Entry: **SCM Column on Communication Measurement**
Division/Category/Subcategory: Division 2: Communication Skills / Category 20: Writing
Entrant's Organization: Sinickas Communications, Inc. (SCI)
Time Period of Project: January-December, 2006
Brief Description: A column in the Melcrum publication *Strategic Communication Management* to help communicators build measurement into all they do and to make better decisions using research results. The goal is to provide practical tips to make communicators more successful.

Need/Opportunity

Audience needs: Communicators are now expected to prove the value of their function, just as every other business unit does. They need practical advice on what they can measure meaningfully, but quickly and cheaply. (A survey we conducted for the evaluation section shows that about 35% have *no* budget for measurement.)

My business needs: I made communication measurement the major thrust of the consulting firm I opened in June 2000. My need is to market my firm to prospective clients and have them think of us when they need help with a measurement project. In a 2002 survey we conducted, 70% of clients who had read my column said it influenced their decision to hire us. Another 25% said it reminded them to consider us for new projects. A column provides an opportunity to stay in front of thousands of communicators repeatedly, and at low cost. If the column succeeds in showcasing our unique brand, clients are less likely to see our services as a commodity to be bought from the lowest bidder.

Intended Audience(s)

Primary audience: The subscribers of *Strategic Communication Management (SCM)*.

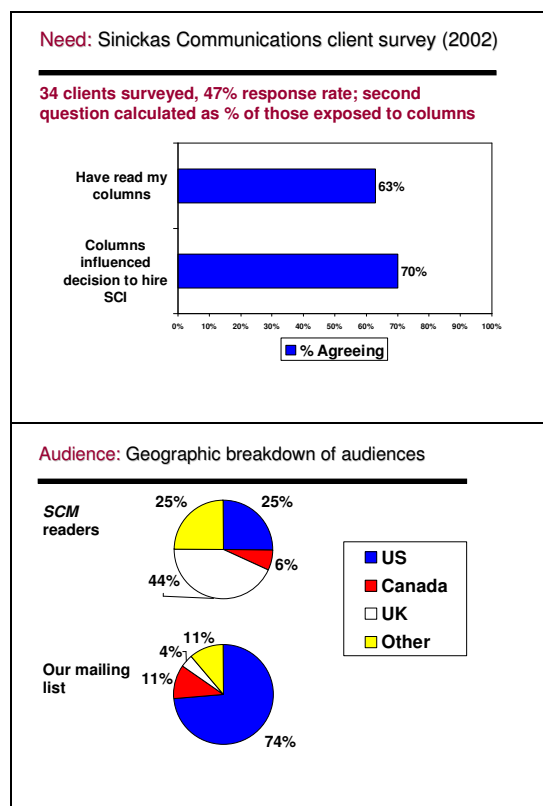
Mandy Thatcher, editor of *SCM*, says:

“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. I'm especially interested in *SCM's* large reader base outside North America, to balance my own list.

Secondary audience: The 6,559 corporate communicators on the SCI reprint mailing list. Their geographical dispersion is reflected in the pie chart above. The individuals on the list have either been clients or have asked to receive my copyrighted reprints by either:

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



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.** Our goals were to:
 - a. Obtain at least 50% of new-client revenue without competitive bidding because the client perceives us to be the only or the best partner for the project due to our reputation (built through the column). This saves us a lot of valuable time and travel expense money.
 - b. Generate leads (and revenue) for projects from clients who would not know of us without the column. No specific amount or percentage of revenue was established upfront.
2. **Provide enduring value to communicators and the SCM publishers:**
 - a. Write the column to be understandable by the average reader (most of whom have university degrees). This translates to a Flesch-Kincaid grade level score of about 16.0.
 - b. Achieve at least a 67% favorable rating surveys conducted by SCM or SCI. (Typically, opinion survey results that are 67% favorable are considered at “strength level.”)

Solution Overview

Since I've been writing for Melcrum since 1998, I didn't need to convince them to let me keep writing. Before each issue, *SCM's* editor e-mails me to discuss the theme for the next issue. I e-mail her my column. She does little copyediting, but does write headlines and opening blurbs.

In writing the column, I try to provide intriguing information that communicators can put to practical use in their jobs. Some columns demystify research techniques (connecting communication to culture and the bottom line). Others offer actionable advice for managing communication based on sometimes surprising research mined from my survey database. Examples of useful, though little known, findings highlighted in the submitted columns include:

- Employees want to read about company strategy and want to meet with management about their business unit's strategy.
- Expecting the face-to-face cascade to broadcast information about strategy is less successful than communicating strategy in written form, *followed* by meetings.

I double the visibility of the column by sending paper or electronic reprints of selected columns, for which I retain the copyright, to the 6,559 corporate communicators on my mailing list. Articles for which I own the copyright are also posted on my www.SiniCom.com Web site. I check online readership of the nearly 100 articles monthly to see which topics are most popular. The columns submitted routinely placed among the top 10 downloads during the second half of 2006 when all three were available online. A typical month saw 89-239 downloads for a column.

Implementation and Challenges

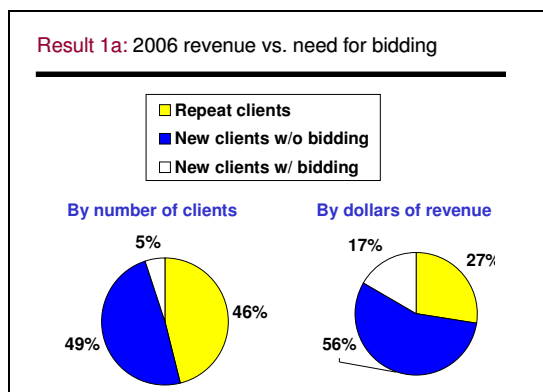
- **Cultural differences.** With a large non-US readership, I refer to many concepts multiple ways to make the writing more familiar and international: team briefings and staff meetings; tick marks and check marks; lay-offs and redundancies. I avoid “dollars” and terms with multiple meanings, such as “turn-over” (employee attrition in the US, profitability in the UK).
- **Limited space.** I write concisely, with heavy use of bullets, bold face, italics and graphics.
- **Lack of time.** Due to my heavy client and travel schedule, I often write the column late at night shortly before the deadline. This presented even more of a challenge in 2006 because Melcrum doubled the column's length from one page during 2005 to two pages in 2006.
- **Budget.** \$0.00. There is none. I write the column for free.
- **Tone:** While I hope the column inspires readers to want to work with us, it never “sells” SCI.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes

For measures, Sinickas Communications and Melcrum use surveys. SCI also analyzes sources of leads, their revenue impact and Website usage. We used SurveyMonkey.com to survey a 2,223-person sample of contacts on our mailing list to identify the connection between column readership and its impact on generating revenue, as well as positive outcomes for our readers.

1. Use the column to help generate revenue:

- a. Obtained 83% of all consulting revenue and 77% of revenue from new-client projects without competitive bidding (goal of 50%). We obtained 19 of 21 new clients without bidding.
- b. While many new clients say they heard of us through the column, most also mention hearing me at a conference. However, one new European client said she heard of us *only* through reading the column. In 2006 we completed several projects for her company totaling \$119,846, without competitive bidding. This revenue, directly due to the column, represents a 48% return on investment, calculated using my billing rate as a measure of the investment of my column-writing time over nine years: $(\$119,846 - \$81,000) / \$81,000$.
- c. Our survey results showed that 86% of those with a measurement budget available say the columns make them more likely to want to hire us or purchase our products. Regarding the 14% who said the columns had no impact, one said it was because an existing vendor holds several years of their data, and another said my past work for them holds more influence than the column.
- d. An unexpected result was that a Russian magazine editor read the column and interviewed me, which led to a proposal request from a Russian mining company.



2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners and the SCM publisher:

- a. Understandability: The reading grade level scores on the submitted columns are 12.6, 13.6 and 14.5 (average of 13.6, or first year university). Our goal was to be under 16.0.
- b. Melcrum's most recent readership survey said that 89% of *SCM* readers find my column is either useful or very useful. Our own survey focused on the *actions taken* after reading the columns, not favorable opinions. Detailed results for all six columns for 2006 appear in the work sample. These results for the "Tailoring campaigns" piece show the types of measures we obtained: 61% are using the information in their work. 54% are sharing columns with other communicators and 12% with non-communicators. Only 7% said they learned little of value. Some sample write-in comments from the survey: "Each article is well written and conceived. And the ingenuity in operationalising organizational variables is impressive." "I'd like to see more on culture (this article was great!)" "I am an adjunct professor and I find the articles very useful in teaching. I've suggested that our marketing department purchase some of your publications." "You do a good job—actually service—of helping communicators think about measuring their impact." "As always your advice and thinking are of huge value to me in my role." "I got information I needed for my projects."
- c. There were several unplanned outcomes showing the columns' value to the *SCM* publishers. Melcrum re-purposed two of the columns as part of reports they sell on Communicating Strategy and on Communication and Culture. The strategy column was re-purposed again for their online *Communication HUB*. Melcrum also paid for me speak in October 2006 at their London Summit on a topic combining the "strategy" and "tailoring" columns.