



**Inventory No:** 6C-059738

**Format:** Reprint

**Title:** Advertising equivalency (AVE)

Public Relations Tactics

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**Summary:** Hundreds of callers this past year have asked for information on how to equate publicity placements with advertising circulation or value.

Many practitioners back themselves into a corner with equivalency because they have not effectively spoken the same language as their client. They need to learn to interpret publicity results based on critical success factors defined with their client.

Angela Sinickas, ABC, of William M. Mercer, encourages practitioners to build a tracking system into the initial program plan based upon what they identify, with their client, as the gauge of impact.

Comparing advertising to public relations is, agreeably, like comparing apples to oranges. What is apparent however, is that advancements in sophisticated ROI analysis evaluation in marketing communications will continue to be applied to public relations as well.

Here is the advice echoed in our interviews with dozens of practitioners on avoiding the advertising equivalency trap:

o Do your homework:

Your report outline is constructed at the outset when you have defined and prioritized publicity objectives, market segments, message variances, potential outlets, and anticipated results (in attitude, sales, brand recall).

o Establish a benchmark:

Focus groups, telephone surveys, purchase statistics, and many other informal and inexpensive research techniques can provide a valid and defensible benchmark upon which you agree to improve.

o Target your audience:

Circulation audits, viewer/listener demographics, geography, and psychographic profiles will point you to the media outlets with the highest concentration of your key audience.

o Get specific:

Follow up focus groups, telephone surveys, retail purchase statistics, and other measurable response generators will provide positive, negative or neutral results.

o Don't sell your efforts short by ignoring credibility:

Positive content and "silent" endorsements boost credibility -- that has no advertising price tag.

o Play It Again, Sam:

Advertisers know when to hit once, twice, three times or more. Allow for repetitive messages to key audiences. Monitoring your exposure allows you to adjust your message or media.

By quoting impressions and using multipliers to compare publicity efforts with advertising value, you're saying to your client that you too equate journalistic authority and media credibility with advertising.

As put by Donald Frenette, a senior public relations practitioner at 3M: "Reactive, nice-guy public relations is on the decline. You've got to set your sights on business targets and aim your programs toward them."

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By Maggi Heffler and G. Blane Withers

THIS IS THE FULL TEXT

