



Inventory No: 6C-059803E

Format: Ask the Professor - A monthly advice column in Public Relations Tactics

Title: My firm wants to measure our publicity results, but we hear conflicting reports about the value of content vs. the number of clips. How can we best give our clients some kind of dollar value analysis of placement success?

Public Relations Tactics

Adams, Professor Bill, APR, Fellow PRSA, 5/1998

Summary: Publicity placement is one PR tactic where size doesn't matter. What you're actually looking for in placement results are: quality (publications and target publications); content (important messages retained in the printed stories); and feedback (media follow-up calls or customer orders). You need this information to make your internal and external clients happy.

There was a time where a stack of clips resulting from a news release, press conference or other event was sufficient evidence for management to think PR folks were doing their job.

And even today, quantity is sometimes confused with quality. What about your intended message? With publicity being an uncontrolled form of communication, it's crucial for PR people to analyze not only the content of each placement, but feedback as well.

With persuasion the usual goal of public relations writing, you must research your results in that light: Who reads your material? Were attitudes changed? Did you convince people to come to your event? Did your publicity help swing a Congressional vote? Is there a better understanding of your organization's goals?

You get the picture.

Now, what about putting "dollar values" on placement results? One argument goes something like this: Since everyone knows publicity is akin to a third-party endorsement because it appears as news, you should be able to devise a formula that takes into consideration what space would cost were you to buy it, and then multiply that cost by a factor that would give you a nice, tidy dollar figure to show your client.

Space won't permit an in-depth discussion of the "dollar value" debate, but suffice it to say a number of very successful, ethical and well-meaning firms have conjured up such formulas. The variations are endless, and we won't attempt to analyze any of them here, except to say -- be careful.

Perhaps the best analysis of placement value was summarized in a PR News article last year by Robert McGrath of the Weiser Group: "The effectiveness (of publicity) can't be measured at the end if you don't determine the objective in the beginning."

THIS IS THE FULL-TEXT.