

Proving PR success in digital media

The PR sector is perennially challenged to prove its worth, and is under more pressure than ever to justify its share of diminishing communication budgets. More specifically, as the first decade of the 21st century comes to an end, the need to provide meaningful measurement of PR activity undertaken in the digital media environment is greater than ever.

Despite an intense industrywide effort to find ways to measure digital media and increasing demand from clients for accurate evaluation of digital media campaigns, no set of standard metrics has been agreed on. Of more concern at this time, though, is that, as with anything new, digital media measurement is vulnerable to opportunists looking to make a buck with a quick fix that is received enthusiastically by its target market not because it is right or good but because there is nothing else.

For example, an article in the online peer-reviewed journal *First Monday* (www.firstmonday.org) asks whether some of the criteria currently being used to calculate influence in social networks really do as they say.

The article, "Social Networks That Matter: Twitter Under the Microscope," examines the state of complexity within Twitter user networks. Its central claim is that the daily grind of work, coupled with the short attention span of Internet users, means that there is actually far less real interaction among social network users than imagined. Instead, it cites the second tier of the more informal and amorphous network of "followers" and "followees," who post fewer updates, or none at all, but who regularly follow the feeds from a given user.

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PR in digital media environments: that it is a one-dimensional assumption that does not demonstrate any understanding of the tool. The number of "friends" a user has says nothing about the level of engagement of those friends with the user. The same can be said of other metrics used in the digital media space, from search engine rankings and web site traffic to qualitative measures such as content analysis and discourse analysis.

The bewildering array of potential metrics for evaluating digital media poses a distinct set of problems. A great deal of attention is paid to *how* digital media is measured and far less to *what* should be measured and *why*.

The number of "friends" a user has says nothing about the level of engagement of those friends with the user.

We've been here before. Measurement of PR success in mainstream media has been debated for decades and continues to evolve. What is vital is first being clear about what constitutes success and therefore what needs to be measured. The methodology should then be tailored accordingly.

As when measuring the success of mainstream media PR efforts, first ascertain how the client defines the success of its digital media PR activity. Then recommend the appropriate tools to measure the results of that activity in the context of the client's wider business strategy, proving ROI that ties to commercial business objectives.

Once you've set these parameters, you must agree on the appropriate way to measure trust, reputation and influence. Key to this is a keen understanding of the different online tools that facilitate conversation. When measuring PR in digital media, it is vital to select a supplier with a proven track record. Check out their blog and Twitter feeds to see if they really know what they are talking about.

PR programs are not one-size-fits-all, and neither are the programs to measure their success—in digital or mainstream media. •



about the author

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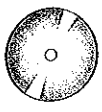


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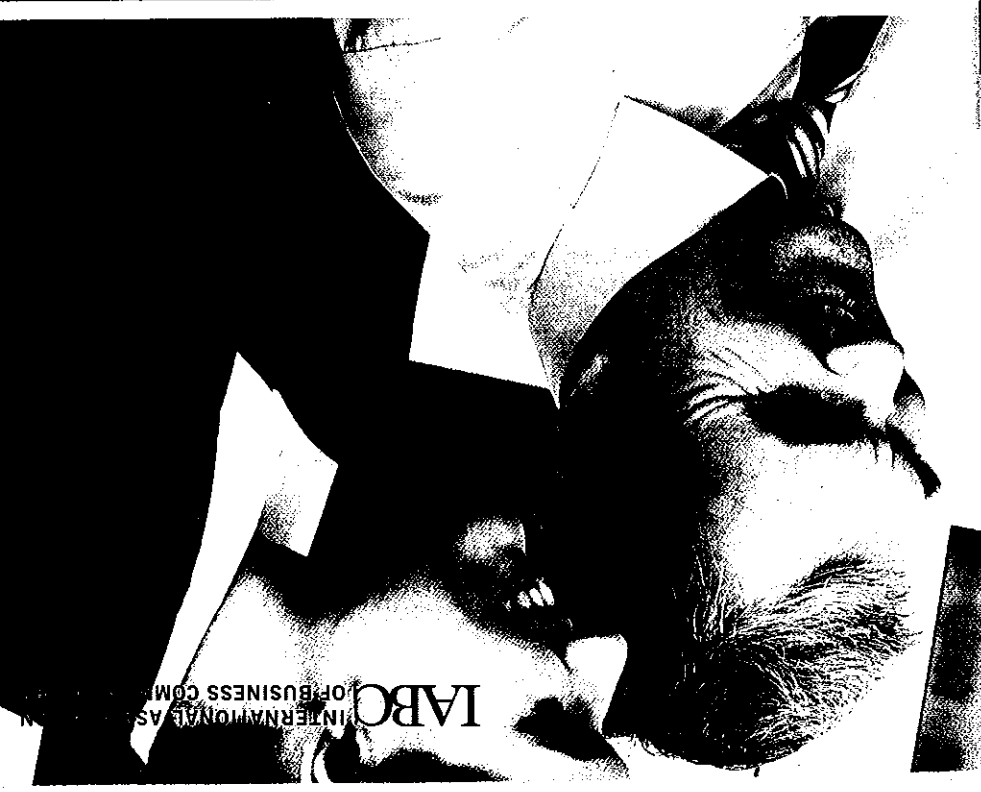
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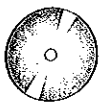


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