



## Measuring Success?

I often get asked about how to measure the success of communication. It's a fair question. If you are going to invest more time and effort in communicating with your customers and employees then you will want to know what value you are adding to your business.

The trouble is that public relations and communication activity are notoriously difficult to measure. It is easy enough to keep track of how much press coverage you receive and how many hits you have had on the company website. And you can keep a record of the number of staff meetings held and questions responded to. But these measures simply tell you what you are doing, they don't help you understand how people react to your messages and how they are being influenced by your efforts.

So you may be delighted to see a full page article in the trade magazine about one of your new products. But to measure the success of that article, you also need to know who is reading it and how the article influences their attitude to your company. Has it made them think more favorably about you? Most importantly, will it make them more likely to buy your products?

Similarly with internal communication, it is not enough just to hold a staff meeting and to send out regular emails, or even to produce a glossy company magazine. You need to know what employees are actually thinking about the company they work for. And you also want to be sure that by investing in staff communication, you are actually getting higher levels of trust, engagement and through that higher productivity.

So how do you go about measuring the success or otherwise of your public relations and communication activity?

The short answer is, of course, through regular research and by taking every opportunity you can to get feedback on what people are thinking about your company (as we have discussed before, listening is a very important part of good communication and of a successful business).

Research doesn't have to be expensive or, in this instance, particularly sophisticated. For internal audiences, it could simply be a case of asking people to fill in feedback

forms at the end of team meetings. If you ask the same questions on a regular basis, you can soon start to track changing attitudes to company reputation and to particular company policies. Typically, I advise companies to include questions about levels of understanding and confidence in the company strategy; if your communication is working well you should start to see those levels increase over time.

Similarly with customers, there are a number of ways that you can research how well your messages are getting across. It can be as simple as asking customers how they heard about your services and products, or ensuring that any response forms you put on company literature can be traced back to their origin – so you know which communication channels – direct mail, advertising, press coverage – are having the best effect.

At another level you might want to consider running annual surveys of both customers and staff, asking them about their overall view of your company, its services and products and also about the methods of communication that work best for them.

The key thing is to be consistent about the questions you ask. If you get the questions right in the first instance, then over time you can build up a very detailed picture of how people's views of your company are changing and why. And given that communication is all about getting people to understand and value your company, asking them just how well you are doing, is probably the most effective way of measuring your effort.

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