

## Down the PR measurement rabbit hole

By Chris Frates  
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The ongoing debate about PR measurement is like the scene in *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice has slipped down the rabbit hole and falls past old mirrors, lamps, grandfather clocks, and Victorian furniture on her way to Wonderland.

But the PR measurement rabbit hole is full of discarded white papers, surveys, blog posts, blog posts about other blog posts and tweets retweeting links to blog posts about blog posts. It's endless. And it doesn't lead to Wonderland (though there might be an angry client at the bottom ready to shout, "Off with their heads!").

Clearly, there is a need for new approaches to measurement, but are we really committed to pursuing them? Or are we just jockeying for position in the race to determine which buzzword or proprietary concept will be most effective in helping us dodge and defer providing an answer to the basic question of ROI?

Many of the emerging social media-driven approaches to measurement are becoming "curiouser and curiouser," to use Alice's phrase. Most center on some variation on the concept of engagement, a halfway point between a PR result and a real business outcome. To be fair, engagement metrics (Web site visits, opt-ins, social media comments, etc.) do feel like a more satisfying measurement criterion than the much-maligned concept of media impressions, but soon the same clients who were asking, "What is the real value of a media impression?" will be asking, "What is the real value of a Web site visit or a retweet?"

Clearly, programs that result in sales increases or stock price movement are the most satisfying for

clients. Results like this are easy to understand. But should we automatically dismiss any communications program that doesn't generate an immediate bump in stock price or sales? What about PR results that are hard to isolate because they are part of a broader marketing mix? How should we measure programs that are designed to build or protect a reputation instead of sell a product?

In the end, whether you're still relying on impressions to measure media hits or trying to grin and spin your way out of every uncomfortable question about how PR results translate into real business outcomes, PR professionals should agree on one thing: We have reached a crossroads, and the growing pressure to identify ways to measure social media has only increased the urgent need to choose a path forward.

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