

PR Technology, Data and Insights

PR Technology, Data and Insights

*Igniting a Positive Return on Your
Communications Investment*

Mark Weiner



Publisher's note

Every possible effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this book is accurate at the time of going to press, and the publishers and authors cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions, however caused. No responsibility for loss or damage occasioned to any person acting, or refraining from action, as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by the editor, the publisher or the author.

First published in Great Britain and the United States in 2021 by Kogan Page Limited

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms should be sent to the publishers at the undermentioned addresses:

2nd Floor, 45 Gee Street
London
EC1V 3RS
United Kingdom
www.koganpage.com

122 W 27th St, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10001
USA

4737/23 Ansari Road
Daryaganj
New Delhi 110002
India

Kogan Page books are printed on paper from sustainable forests.

© Mark Weiner, 2021

The right of Mark Weiner to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBNs

Hardback 978 1 3986 0042 3
Paperback 978 1 3986 0040 9
Ebook 978 1 3986 0041 6

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

[to follow]

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pondicherry
Print production managed by Jellyfish
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Without my bride, Braden, and my sons, Graham and Cameron, I would not be where I am tonight. Without them, this honor would not hold the same meaning.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Tina McCorkindale x

Preface xii

Acknowledgments xv

Introduction 1

PART ONE

Technology, Data, and Insights 21

01 Technology 23

Big Data 24

Artificial Intelligence 26

Audience Targeting Technology 31

Tools to Find Earned Media Opportunities 33

Earned/Owned Media Production and Distribution Tools 35

Technology for Engagement 37

Technology for Media Monitoring and Social Listening 40

Tools for PR Measurement, Analysis, and Evaluation 42

Will PR Technology Replace PR Professionals? 45

Endnotes 46

02 Data 47

Introducing Data to Public Relations 48

Objectives, Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, and Business Results 49

Understanding PR Data 64

Data's Role in Corporate Communication 66

Conclusion 68

Endnotes 69

03 Insights 71

- The Current State of Technology-Driven Data-Informed Public Relations Insights 72
- The Public Relations Insights Discovery Process 79
- Bringing It All Together 86
- Endnotes 94

PART TWO**The Public Relations Continuum 95****04 The Landscape Analysis 97**

- The Benefits of a Landscape Analysis 98
- The Landscape Analysis Process 99
- The Public Relations Landscape Analysis Tool Kit 102
- The Executive Audit 102
- The Journalist/Influencer Audit 108
- Surveys 113
- Media Demographic Audit 114
- Retroactive Media Analysis 116
- The Landscape Analysis Process: Insights 119
- Conclusion 119

05 Setting Objectives 121

- The Importance of Setting Objectives 122
- The Technology-Enabled, Data-Informed Process for Setting Objectives 124
- Objectives Should Be Measurable 125
- Objectives Should Be Meaningful 128
- Objectives Should Be Reasonable 129
- When to Review Your Objectives 131
- The Do-It-Yourself Guide to Setting Objectives that are Measurable, Meaningful, and Reasonable 133
- If Management Wants PR Objectives and PR Wants to Prove Value, Why Doesn't Everyone Set Objectives? 141
- Thoughts and Implications 142
- Conclusion 144
- Endnotes 147

06 Strategy and Tactics 149

Separating Strategy from Tactics 150

The Benefits of Strategy 152

How to Develop a Strategy 152

Media Segmentation: Target Audience Reach is Better Than Gross
Reach 154

Media Targeting 156

Message Development 163

Why Strategies Fail 165

Tactics 166

Tactical Public Relations 167

Why Tactics Fail 172

Conclusion 172

Endnotes 173

07 Evaluation 175

The Benefits of Evaluation 176

The Right Way to Evaluate Your Public Relations Performance 176

Evaluating Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, and Business Results 177

Evaluating the Public Relations Continuum 181

Evaluating Objectives 185

Evaluating Strategy and Tactics 188

Evaluating Evaluation 199

Why Doesn't Every PR Person Evaluate Their Performance? 199

Endnotes 207

Epilogue 209

Index 211

FOREWORD

The ability to think intelligently, strategically, and to adapt quickly becomes more critical in public relations every day with the accelerated pace of change, technological innovation, and competition. Recently, I saw a great meme that featured two cartoon characters struggling to pull a cart fitted with square blocks instead of round wheels up a hill. A person carrying a set of round wheels is following them, trying to convince them to use his wheels rather than their square blocks, but they both decline, saying “no thanks” and that they are “too busy.” Sometimes, I think this example represents how the public relations and communication industry treats data and the insights it derives from it.

In this book, Mark Weiner, a well-regarded and trusted leader in our field, offers much-needed guidance on how people can generate a positive return on their communication investment through technology, data, and insights. He makes the case by emphasizing that it’s better to “begin simply” than not to begin at all. The public relations industry needs to speak the language of the executives we’re asking for support, budget, and resources. But still, measurement and evaluation remain challenging tasks for many in our profession.

A few years ago, I attended an industry conference for top executives in the public relations industry. One of the presenters, a well-regarded chief communications officer, discussed a “successful” event her team hosted for her company. When an attendee asked how they measured its success, the CCO replied, “We didn’t measure it. We’re just not there yet.” This CCO is not a rarity.

Mark makes a case with practical solutions for data-driven decision-making that can be done on any budget. At the Institute for Public Relations, our tagline is “the science beneath the art of public relations™” and that is exactly the case Mark makes here to marry the science and the art. Data can help. What you can do with the data and how you can leverage insights to drive impact on the business is the holy grail. Many want to do it, but few actually find it. Mark’s book can change that so all companies can find that holy grail. PR can absolutely be quantified.

With the rapid pace of change, our profession must evolve so we don’t get left behind. Blockbuster could have been Redbox, and Yahoo! could have been Google. While this may be overly simplistic, we all can be better at harnessing the information accessible to us. As Mark Weiner states, “The absence of applied technology, data, and insights is a matter of ‘unwillingness’ rather than ‘inability.’”

And I'm not just talking about media data—that's only one kernel on an ear of corn. We have a plethora of tools and techniques accessible to us that can help drive decision-making. Mark outlines how we can best collect data and choose the right analytical tools and techniques that harbor valid and meaningful insights, rather than contributing only to "success theater."

Predictive analytics, big data and little data analyses, surveys, and stakeholder tracking are just some of the measures that can be implemented and implemented well. We still have an opportunity to be innovative in measurement, though. As Mark spotlights in his book, "Conventional thinking is the enemy of innovation and breakthrough results."

Mark emphasizes that businesses demand that whatever can be automated will. This allows more time for us to be more proactive, thoughtful, and strategic. Throughout the book, Mark uses his expertise and optimism to offer practical ways for us to be smarter. The lessons he draws show us there's no reason why we shouldn't. And Mark is the best of the best to lead us on this journey. As a top leader in the PR industry with extensive experience, Mark offers his book as an indispensable guide to understand what we need to do to succeed to be smart, brave, strategic, and better leaders to help our companies be stronger and more successful.

*Tina McCorkindale, PhD, APR
President and CEO, Institute for PR*

PREFACE

Corporate communications and public relations face a defining moment. Technology, data, and insights now shape the day-to-day practice of many thousands of professional communicators. Now, more than ever before, the way we practice public relations reflects both the science and the art. The most important reason for this? Public relations needed to evolve in response to the business imperative everyone in business now faces: the need to deliver a quantifiable return on investment.

The good news: public relations delivers the most efficient returns on investment within the marketing and communications mix. We may not drive the highest sales volume, but we drive sales at an extraordinarily low cost. As such, the sales we deliver cost remarkably little when compared with advertising, price promotions, and other forms of marketing communication. Smart companies invest in PR for this reason. Smart CEOs recognize that the organizations they lead must listen to and interact with a much broader group of stakeholders. And the best chief communications officers recognize the growing importance of their ability to properly position the enterprise on rapidly emerging issues of extreme sensitivity. The status of public relations within this environment is primed for historic growth. Technology provides us with the data and insights we need to deliver positive business results and to represent the organization on matters that resonate beyond shareholders: environmental sustainability. Diversity and inclusion. Workplace environment. All within a heightened awareness of societal well-being, racism, sexism, and other extremely sensitive moral and ethical issues on which companies must take a position.

In Part One, we describe and explore the key elements shaping public relations today: technology, data, and insights. The three elements combine to deliver the return on investment that businesses demand. Note here that PR's future will be a function of our ability to marry the best of technology with uniquely human attributes. Technology enables us to execute efficiently and consistently, but humans provide the interpretive analysis, actionable insights, and strategic guidance on which organizations depend. Technology may enable "real time," but only human analysis and insights empower "right time" decision-making.

In Part Two, we show how communicators apply technology and talent in each phase of the public relations continuum. The continuum describes every communications effort: beginning with landscape analysis and proceeding through objectives setting, strategy development, and tactical execution, and ending with evaluation for continuous improvement, the public relations process is cyclical rather than linear and improves with every rotation.

After starting my career in the newspaper business with *The New York Times* and Tribute Media, I've worked in research-based public relations for 35 years. I've worked in executive positions for organizations that provide research, analysis, evaluation, and insights. During my career, I've had the opportunity to counsel many of the world's greatest organizations. Along the way, I've learned valuable lessons beyond what you'll read in this book. Perhaps the most important lesson: learning is among the most difficult tasks we undertake. I've learned some lessons the hard way... perhaps that's why they're the most enduring. Here, I'm happy to share what I've learned in my career in communications analysis and research:

- If you're just getting started in data-informed communication and feel a bit overwhelmed by it, I suggest that you begin simply but simply begin. It's as true in business as it is in life.
- Being approximately right is better than being completely clueless.
- If you find yourself in debates over whether "data" is a singular noun or plural, or if you argue over the advantages of a five-point scale versus a seven-point scale, you need to refocus on what really matters: accurate, data-driven insights that inform better decisions. Concentrate on that and you'll succeed.
- Life isn't win or lose. I've led a more contented life by remembering that failure informs future success. As a business leader, I allowed for failure: rather than win/lose, business (and life) are win/learn propositions. It's up to us to make the most of every opportunity.
- Research and data bridge the gap between PR and business. Data is the language of business. Learn to speak the same language as the people who evaluate PR performance and who decide on PR budget allocation.
- It's true that PR enjoys the benefits of some amazing technology. Don't forget that, nowadays, *everyone* has a PR tool. *Everyone* has PR data. Focus your attention on the best way to *think* about the data, and how to *manage* the tool. Despite advancements, human ingenuity, reasoning, and critical thinking cannot be replaced... not yet, anyway.

When I began writing the book, I envisioned an intended audience comprised of professional communicators in corporations, agencies, government, and non-profits around the world. Public relations people will recognize some of what's featured here, but the approaches we recommend may be new to all but a small minority. Of course, the CEOs or CMOs who fund PR and evaluate PR performance will also benefit. Every chapter ends with a list of questions every PR investment decision-maker should ask of their PR team. As a communications professional, you should be prepared to answer them, as well.

A friend once told me, "Dinosaurs would still be alive today if they could only predict the weather." With this book in hand, you possess the tools and guidance you'll need to tell which way the wind blows. The keys to success include technology, data, and insights, certainly. We also need an open mind to recognize and embrace the irreversible changes in our public relations landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this book wasn't easy. But how lucky I am to be supported by so many people (many of whom turn up later when I needed to invent a brand or product name to make a point).

I thank Braden Bledsoe, my bride, whose love and patience supported me through the late nights and long weekends required to complete the manuscript. My sons Graham and Cameron who have grown to be outstanding men. My parents and my sister Lesley gave me the framework I needed to navigate my life. I welcomed support from Susan and Bill Bledsoe as well as from Cresta and Tom Bledsoe and their twins Isles and Clary. They, along with lifelong friends Harlan Marks and Bob Pierce, provided me with a steady diet of "how's the book coming?" Without my family and friends, the book wouldn't have happened.

I've worked for fantastic companies in my career: I thank my colleagues present and past from whom I've learned more than I could have dreamed. I must thank our clients with whom we've accomplished so much and whose stories I share. In particular, I must recognize colleague and friend Chelsea Mirkin, whose intelligence and determination elevate everyone around her. Also, I've been lucky to experience blessed mentorship from Kevin Clancy, PhD, Larry Moskowitz, Dan Barber, and Jack Felton. I'm not sure they knew how they affected me but here's a chance to express my gratitude in public.

Finally, I must recognize the spark behind it all: Kathe Sweeny, with whom I collaborated on my first book, *Unleashing the Power of PR*, who remembered me and reached out to gauge my interest in writing the encore. She kept the faith through ideation, conception, and an extraordinary slog through writer's block. She prevailed and now, so have I.

Here, in this book, you hold the contributions of many people with whom and through whom I gained the experience and earned the opportunity to share my story.

