



EARNED MEDIA UPRISING: **POWER PR WITH TRUE MEASUREMENT**

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Introduction

Every organization has an objective. Whether it is profitability, growth or sustainability, every employee and representative must give their best effort to make a positive business impact. Enterprises must overcome the hurdle of integrating disparate aspects of the business to understand how each department relates to each other to discover what's working, what's not and what should be done about it (and when).

Leading companies overcome this challenge by translating the unique languages of communications, finance, marketing, sales, production and other essentials into a common language: **data**. Data is the basis of business and boardroom decision-making.

Public relations and communications are not exempt. And yet, measurement continues to vex our profession and stunt our potential due to an unwillingness to measure by communicators who choose not to, and the isolation of PR data among those who do. Nearly 75 per cent of chief communications and chief marketing officers [don't feel that they are fully capitalizing on all the benefits of technology and data](#) to modernize their communications programs.

As professional communicators, we must align common practice with the demands of the business. If executives require information

and context to determine which investments are most likely to produce viable long-term success, PR's earned media data stream must integrate with other business data to make more holistic investment decisions. If PR performance is not quantifiable, integratable and insightful, it's almost impossible to demonstrate — and *generate* — a positive contribution towards the organization's objectives. In the absence of a robust calculable PR foundation, investments will continue to go to those who can provide the necessary data, and public relations will continue to struggle.

The purpose of this paper is to share the good news — a new approach to fact-based earned media optimization reveals how a combination of advanced technology and expert talent supplement existing methods to help revolutionize earned media, communications and marketing decision-making.

Searching for the Measurements that Matter

While earned media and public relations play an essential role in building the brand, generating revenue, creating efficiency and avoiding catastrophic cost, most practitioners and even leaders don't quantify their contribution. Vague, indeterminate measures like "buzz" or "breaking through the media clutter" may mean something within the public relations community, but they mean nothing to the C-Suite. According to the [2017 Global Comms Report](#), 75 per cent of senior executives feel the comms industry can do better at measuring and proving its impact on business objectives. Top executives need complete and meaningful communications intelligence, and so do we.

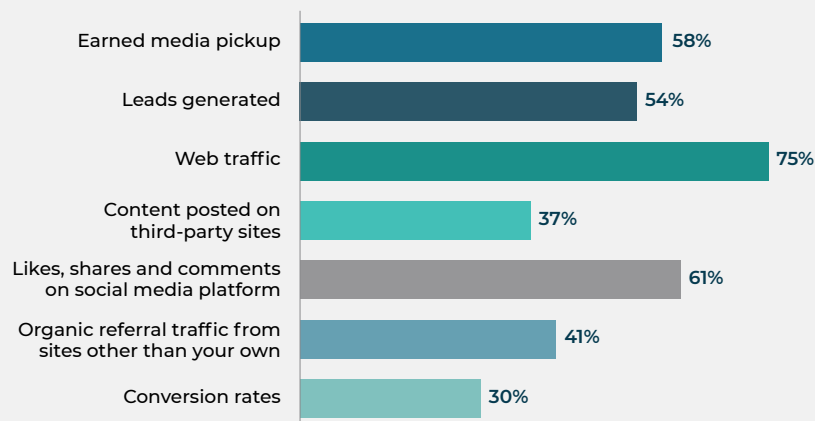
In a market intelligence analysis driven by Cision®, market research firm *Demand Gen Report* interviewed 169 management-level marketing and communications respondents from B2B companies in North America. The study, [The Shifting Strategies for Earned Media](#), found that earned media influences performance marketing.

However, most PR people are measuring earned media efforts via web traffic, clips, pickup, likes, and shares because it's difficult to quantify PR's effect on leads generated, conversion rate tracking, revenue, or other meaningful measures of business impact. As a result, public relations remains on the periphery of the marketing mix.

While the survey findings showed that B2B marketers are starting to measure earned media investment against performance goals, they also revealed that marketers con-

What metrics do you use to measure earned media efforts?

(Choose all that apply)



Most B2B marketers are unwilling or unable to measure earned media in ways that connect PR to business outcomes.

Source: <http://www.cision.ca/resources/white-papers/earnedmedia-performance/>

tinue to struggle with how best to evaluate traditional and social media coverage.

The study found that while many B2B organizations would like to shift more of their budgets to earned media, they lack confidence in PR's ability to measure and communicate the ROI of earned media.

To secure a level of primacy within the marketing and business-decision making process, public relations must connect performance data with business results as other disciplines within the organization do now.

The most compelling examples are those measurement applications which quantify earned media's place within the sales funnel and PR's measurable impact on revenue generation.

Until now, there were two ways for public relations to draw a link to closed-won sales:

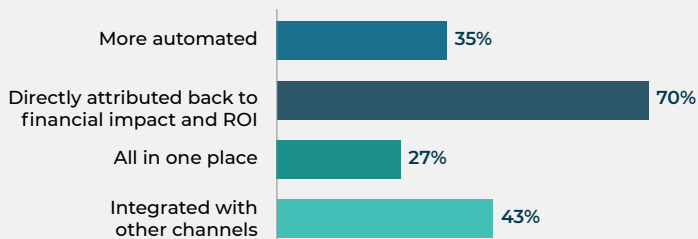
- **Marketing mix models:** Since mass market advertising and promotions dominate marketing spending (PR averages about 1 per cent of the typical marketing expenditure for mass-market brands), and because modeling is expensive and data-intensive, most modeling is led by marketing. As such, public relations data, when it's included at all, is dependent on others to "invite" PR to participate and outside of PR's control.

In summary: Modeling can be very useful and effective but it's also expensive and inaccessible for most PR budgets.

- **Public relations in isolation:** There are cases, where a sales spike occurs when the only in-market activity is public relations. With no other way to explain the sales surge, success is attributed to PR.

I would use earned media more if it was:

(Choose all that apply)



Among B2B marketers, 70 per cent of those surveyed say they would like to shift even more of their budgets to earned media if it was directly attributable to financial impact and ROI.

Source: <http://www.cision.ca/resources/white-papers/earnedmedia-performance/>

But public relations rarely operates in isolation and one must account for other modes of simultaneous marketing output.

In summary, "PR in Isolation" may be inexpensive, but it's extremely rare (since there's usually so many other channels operating simultaneously whether you know it or not).

In both examples, public relations performance is based on *derivative* rather than *direct* attribution. Models are based on an algorithm or formula while "PR in isolation" is based on broad assumptions that a) PR was, in fact, operating without the support of other marketing vehicles and b) that PR is the only way to explain the increase (perhaps a competitor doubled their prices and their customers shifted allegiances).

The good news? Technology advances now enable public relations to quantify digital public relations independently and affordably.

A New Way to Quantify the Impact of Earned Media on Business

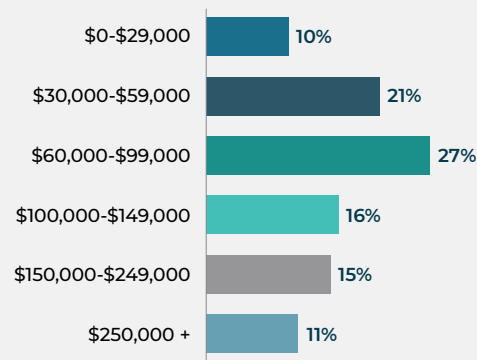
According to the Global Comms Report, 63 per cent of communications professionals placed inability to measure impact effectively in their top three most difficult challenges. While existing methods for tracking reach, frequency, message penetration and sentiment continue to provide meaningful guidance for planning and continuous improvement, new supplemental approaches promise to revolutionize public relations. The spark for this uprising is *attribution analysis*.

For years, marketers have applied attribution analysis to assess the impact of their digital campaigns and events by assigning credit for every successful marketing interaction from awareness, engagement, lead acquisition and, ultimately, a successful sale. Understanding how one's public relations activities move a prospect down the funnel is critical in today's multi-faceted business accountability environment.

Attribution analysis applies an invisible watermark to every digital news item covering your company, brand and product. The watermark is indelible, so the technology follows an individual reader (anonymously) from the news page to your website (or your competitors'). Once on the website, the technology identifies every level of interaction: the reader focused on the "About Us" section, or they downloaded an order form or application. For e-commerce sites, one can attribute a sale to an individual news or feature item whether that story was planned or not.

Demographic Data Example: Adams Morgan can determine the annual income of those who read their story

Readership, by income



ADAMS MORGAN: *"Spring is the best time to buy a house, new study finds"*

In this example, 26% of readers earned more than \$150,000 annually. If the company sells luxury houses, this may represent an opportunity for better targeting and messaging. If the company sells more modest homes, 64% of readers match the optimal target which provides affirmation that the targeting and messaging worked.

Besides confirming with 100 per cent accuracy that someone clicked on your news or feature story and engaged with your website, the underlying technology allows for another layer of demographic and firmographic information based on a user's IP address. As such, the communicator can describe the interested party by age, gender, annual income, net worth, education level and more.

And for B2B communicators, there's a layer of firmographic data to help you categorize the type of company employing the individual. Criteria include the industry (food services, manufacturing, telecom, etc.), size and role within the company (C-suite, SVP, manager, etc.).

Applications for **Better** **Decision-Making**

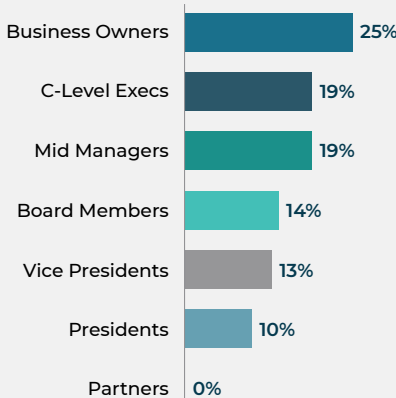
Rather than making traditional approaches to media analysis and evaluation obsolete, the new technology builds upon the existing foundation. A complete earned media analysis program now looks like this:

- **Quantitative measures:** Frequency (number of news stories and social posts) and reach (circulation/audience/followers/likes, etc.).
- **Qualitative measures:** Sentiment/tone, intended/unintended corporate and brand reputation messaging, spokespeople, influencers, issues, etc.
- **Comparative measures:** Performance over time, against objectives and versus competitors/peers.
- **Attribution measures:** The new essential element: digital earned media clicks and click-throughs, image views, video plays, document opens and downloads, audience demographic/firmographic profiling and segmentation, and conversion from reading a news item or post to downstream activity including shopping cart/revenue and lead generation.

These four data sources provide the basis for expert analysts to uncover the actionable insights and strategic guidance communicators need to navigate and win. This combination of technology and talent provides

Firmographic Data Example: Adams Morgan can review firmographic readership and other data for their earnings report.

Readership, by position

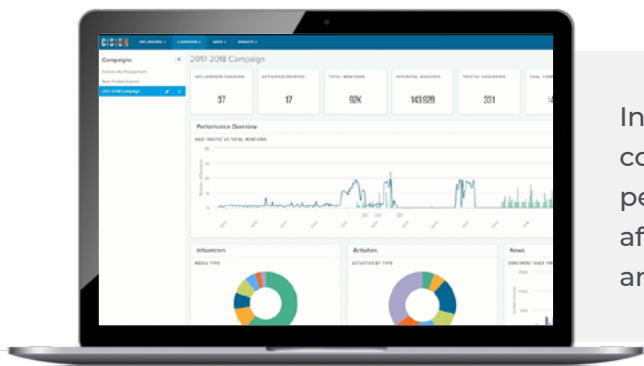


ADAMS MORGAN: “Business owners, c-level execs and mid managers combined make up the majority readership of earnings report readership.

If this campaign intended to reach upper management, more than half of the people who read campaign content were on-target and on-message.

communicators with the facts they need to communicate PR performance to executives and generate a positive return on PR investment by connecting public relations results to the sales funnel.

The most common applications for research and data in public relations are to assess program performance after-the-fact. The campaign is completed, and a performance report is how most communicators represent the success of their initiative. While



In addition to the quantitative, qualitative and comparative, attribution reports detail how many people actually click on a story and their actions after initial engagement including website visits and revenue generated.

attribution analysis represents a significant advancement for earned media evaluation, it provides invaluable guidance throughout the communications cycle:

- **Landscape Analysis:** Begin your campaign by assessing your brand's position within its competitive and regulatory environment by exploring demographics and media penetration among target audiences.
- **Objectives Setting:** Set more meaningful goals by including specific audience segmentation targets. Beyond quantitative, qualitative and competitive, identify PR contribution goals for every stage in the sales funnel.
- **Strategy Development:** Use attribution to specify which media and messages generate the most interaction among target audiences. Apply this data in creating a framework based on "what works" rather than conventional wisdom.
- **Tactics/Campaign Design and Execution:** Attribution analysis indicates which events and themes drive bursts of measurable response within the sales funnel.

- **Evaluation:** Assess your contribution to revenue generation after each campaign or as part of the monthly or quarterly review. Align your performance with marketing and sales to demonstrate PR's ability to elevate the enterprise.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Apply what one learns to refine programs over time, compared to objectives, competitors and what drives the most meaningful response.

Conclusion

Today, everyone in public relations has a real-time tool, and everyone has data ... too much data. What's needed now is the *right data* at the *right time*. The combination of advanced technology with the talent to optimize these tools with category expertise and statistical acumen achieve the outcomes communicators need now: actionable insights and integratable data to quantify PR's ability to align with other business data streams to isolate PRs unique contribution to business success.



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ABOUT **MARK WEINER**

Mark Weiner is a member of the Arthur Page Society, an advisor for The University of Florida Public Relations Advisory Council, and a trustee for the Institute for Public Relations for which he also chairs the Commission on Measurement and Evaluation. Mark is the 2018 recipient of the Institute for Public Relations Jack Felton Medal for Lifetime Achievement.