



PR – The Brand Pacemaker

Uncovering the link between PR and brand health.

This paper seeks to use current PR Measurement and Evaluation results to prove the link between brand health and PR. The approach suggested builds a framework around three key communication themes: *Perceived product strength, emotional affinity, perceived status/ familiarity*. It then presents a model of influence and offers three options for translating PR efforts into brand effect.

- Option 1: PR Output: ongoing PR Evaluation measuring the Output of brand messages – **quantify the volume/ Impact of brand messages in PR.**
- Option 2: Individual Effect: Add PR module to Brand Health Tracker to isolate brand exposures – **isolate source of specific brand exposures that changed attitudes.**
- Option 3: Behaviour Effect: Correlate PR Impact with Brand Health metric using regression analysis – **measure PR effect on all brand exposures and link to changes in behaviour.**

With careful consideration to the inclusion of strong brand messaging and the appropriate measurement approach, PR can fairly claim its share of brand equity.

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1. Questioning Accepted Thinking

Why is the brand so important for PR professionals to consider? According to Frasier Seital, author of the Practice of Public Relations, “marketing and sales have the primary objective of selling an organisation’s products, while public relations attempt to sell the organisation itself “ (Harrison, 2000). This works on the theory that consumer goodwill towards a company leads to brand equity...

– the added value a brand name bestows on a product or service beyond the functional benefits provided

(Kerin & Peterson, 2003)





1. PR – Questioning Accepted Thinking

The value has two distinct benefits. Firstly, brand equity provides a competitive advantage over alternatives. Secondly, brand equity often allows a premium price to be charged such as with Tag watches or Magnum Ice-cream.

With these benefits it is no surprise there is jostling to claim the kudos of building brand health.

So why does PR have a justifiable effect on brand?

- Across clients and industries we have repeatedly seen that the inclusion of a **positive brand message boosts the average text tone of an article**. Working on favorability alone, branding in PR helps boost preference. If ad liking can build brand liking, surely there is fair claim in the case of PR.
- **PR can deliver more brand-promoting copy than an ad**. Take for example the Body Shop. This brand, primarily built on PR, soon built a strong link 'Body Shop' and 'against animal testing'. As first movers in this industry they have not only built an unbreakable brand bond, they encouraged a revolution of socially and environmentally conscious consumers.
- Articles are much more likely to be read than ads and attitude shifts more effectively achieved. Despite changing trends where people are learning to be skeptical about the media's objectivity, these third party endorsements are still more trusted than ad copy. **This high trust factor gives PR greater opportunity to cut through the clutter**.
- PR practice is often the discipline that looks after reputation – with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinions and behaviour (Hart, 1995). Isn't the aim of changing opinions and behaviour

the exact same goal as branding? While some may suggest the two are different, it is impossible to disconnect them. **With poor reputation branding means nothing.**

With such plausible links to brand health why is the connection and measurement of PR's influence seldom made?

1. Many companies still do not professionally evaluate their PR. Or the capture and interpretation of their communication's investment is still undeveloped. There is a good opportunity to **take the leap from output to outcome**.
2. Advertising often has a much larger budget to justify and has a commensurately larger measurement budget.
3. Some companies see PR as pure risk mitigation rather than a positive brand building/ preference method. **What would happen if PR proved greater bang for buck than advertising?**
4. It is perceived as too difficult to separate advertising effect from PR, sales promotions, word of mouth and so on. **Difficult, yes – impossible, no.**





2. PR – Building the Framework

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PR and its impact on the elements of Brand Equity

Brand Equity doesn't just happen. It requires careful consideration of how to cement into place unique brand associations that are relevant and valuable to the consumer. PR can work by taking what has been read/ seen before and linking it to the brand for easy retrieval at a later date- operating in much the same way as advertising and more effectively.

The strength of this relationship is founded on basic dynamics: *perceived product strength, emotional affinity and attraction, and perceived status, saliency, familiarity in the market* (Farr, 1999). PR has the ability to achieve all these things in a low cost, high value way that penetrates brand belief. Using PR Measurement and Evaluation results, it is possible to prove that the inclusion of these elements increases the potential influence PR has on the brand.

Much of the positively perceived PR coverage promotes product strength. Across our client base nearly half of all coverage evaluated referred to Products/ Services with an avg. tone of +1.0 (on a +2/-2 scale). PR has the ability to promote in a less biased way (and thus more believably) product reviews, discussions of features and functionality, best of breed product placement and **head-to-head** comparison. Our research across clients shows that head-to-head coverage in the favor of the client has a text tone score on average +0.4 higher than overall coverage.

The Y&R Brand Asset Valuator adds to this idea of perceived product strength, suggesting innovation is the key to brand health (Professional Marketing, June 2006). According to George Patterson Y&R chief strategy officer, Mike Morrison, overcomplicating the decision-making process for consumers can be brand suicide. PR communications must help and not hinder the process to add true value to brand.

Perceived Product Strength



Emotional Affinity



Perceived Status and Familiarity





2. PR – Building the Framework

Emotional affinity/ attraction:

CSR and Sponsorship activities are a driving force behind a good proportion of consumer corporate acceptance and attraction. According to Business in the Community (www.bitc.org.uk) 8 in 10 of the public say it is important to know about a company's activities in society and the community when forming an opinion of it. Further, 38% of the general public say that a company's social responsibility is important in their purchase decisions. This number has been gaining in recent years.

More consumers want to support companies that have CSR strategies in place. PR is a mechanism for promoting these activities. Our results repeatedly indicate CSR and sponsorship activities promote the brand messages of 'Fun', 'Exciting', 'Does things Differently', 'Passionate' and 'Consumer Champion'. When several of these brand attributes resonate through the coverage, we have seen an improvement in average tone of up to 45%.

The Brand Asset Valuator work backs this concept up, suggesting that participation is the key – "making sure the packaging itself isn't the only interaction people have with the brand" (Professional Marketing, June 2006). Interaction and involvement builds affinity.

Perceived status/ saliency /familiarity in the market:

Brands with high awareness and salience have more chance of being considered in the purchase decision. PR helps to build this awareness. For example, Consumer Champion research is on the rise – choosing a topic that is both timely and relevant to the market helps establish your position as a **thought leader**. We have seen that research results are favourably received with exceptional media spread and good average tone. For example, average tone has improved more than 10% with a reference to research sponsored by client.

It is rare to hear discussions extend to the influence of PR activity on brand value like this. A key reason is the limited understanding of how to measure the relationship. We will now explore a combination of approaches that can be used individually or together to build a clear picture.





3. Measuring the link between PR & Brand Health

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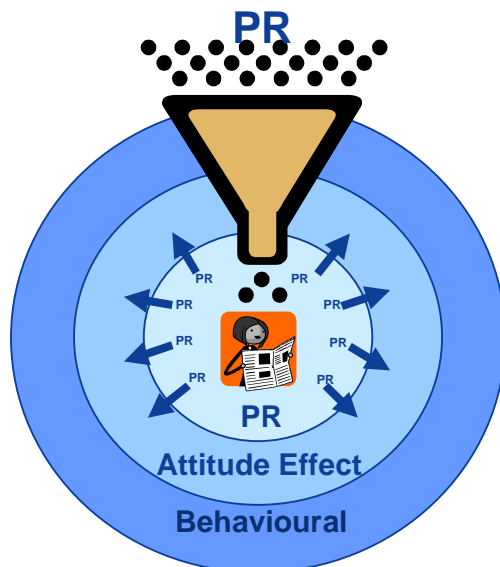
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OPTION 1: PR Evaluation Output

The simplest and most responsive/ direct variable to track is the **Output** of brand in PR communication. PREnhance® provides a salience score of key brand messages in your coverage (see www.precise-value.com.au for more information). Understanding how much your brand image resonates through your communication is the first important step.

PREnhance® can also provide an early indicator on whether the coverage positively reinforced or corroded brand equity.

This type of tracking works on the theory that if frequency, tone and reach of brand statements increases, then PR is contributing more impact to the company's brand equity. A quadrant chart examines size and scope of media to suggest further improvements. **With PR metrics that mirror advertising performance metrics, the client's ability to prove ROI for PR is improved.**



OPTION 2: Individual Effect

In order to show that output effects have an **Outcome**, longer term brand measures of consumer equity are needed. Some examples include brand affinity, purchase consideration and word of mouth. Some of this can be achieved by upgrading existing Brand Health research to include a specific PR module. Here we seek to isolate PR impact through questioning the source of the brand exposure and allocate it accordingly.

A Media diet audit asks a range of questions to establish what PR brand messages the respondent had an opportunity to see. Secondly, with more caution, the PR module can determine if the respondents remember





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where the brand message came from. With the latter it is important to study questioning techniques carefully as consumers typically have difficulty with recall.

As a final catch-all, media consumption levels can be questioned and later grouped into Hi v. Lo. This allows valuable insights to be drawn on the Outcome effects of PR exposure.

A range of analysis opportunities arise from these approaches including:

- perceptual changes of those consumers 'touched' by the PR;
- Is the campaign being registered with the right brand;
- Is the PR creating the right associations that help and not hinder brand health.

OPTION 3: Behaviour Effect

The final step in this framework moves towards an ROI measure of PR by correlating PR Impact to Brand Health metrics using statistical regression analysis. Here we take a more holistic approach and analytically distil the effect PR Impact had on all Brand exposures, no matter how generated.

Continuous Brand tracking is well suited to this approach as its ongoing data collection can detect

activities as they happen.

According to Hugh Mackay in *Why don't people listen*, "it is not what our message does to the listener, but what the listener does with our message, that determines our success as communicators" (Harrison, 2000). The logic behind this is that most brand communication works by influencing people not only at the time of exposure, but also in a delayed way over a long time period. So the communication needs to last long enough to carry them through to their purchase occasion, and should come to mind when they are making a selection.

With this type of analysis data inputs must be carefully collected and structured however the outcomes are extremely valuable. The multi-variate approach helps separate each communication method into an ROI. For example, it suggests a quantified link that says for every 'X' (\$, time, impact etc) that you did of PR you got back 'Y' units of brand benefit. The benefit of this is: it enables you to understand the impact of PR on your brand and therefore allocate future resources accordingly.

Below are some examples of these types of measurement and what they can show...

PR Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Quality/ Nature of brand message ◊ Reach and frequency of brand message ◊ Positive reinforcement vs negative corrosion ◊ Which messages are strong and which are weak ◊ Topic/ Message combinations that reinforce brand ◊ Media diagnostics assess delivery channels
Individual Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Test accuracy of message received by individual ◊ Tie back to media channel that delivered the message ◊ Link to Word of mouth, changes in awareness etc
Behaviour Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Group changes in awareness/ attitude ◊ Link to behaviour change i.e. sales, tendency to complain ◊ Chart against other communication methods to prove effectiveness/ efficiency ◊ Show interplay of communication methods on building brand health





4. Conclusion

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There is no reason why PR cannot prove its place next to other marketing communications in influencing brand health. With careful consideration to the inclusion of strong brand messaging and the appropriate measurement approach, the contribution of PR to brand equity can be quantified with known accuracy.

It is hoped that within time the body of PR analysis knowledge will build to be comparable to that of advertising. Until that time the more advanced organisations stand to gain a competitive advantage over their peers. This advantage comes through a superior understanding of their communications mix and therefore greater effectiveness.



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This Australian company specialises in the analysis of marketing and communications. They are dedicated to providing advanced methodologies and measurable improvement strategies that assist

businesses to make better, quantifiable marketing decisions. Michael has a strong market research and strategy background in which he has explored a wide range of survey and statistical analyses.

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