Telling the Full Story: Numbers and Narrative in PR Reporting

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In a recent blog, our PR experts shared [best practices](#) in public relations (PR), including using metrics to show campaign value.

A successful PR strategy delivers both measurable business results and strategic brand insight. To truly know if your PR campaigns are working, evaluate both the numbers (quantitative metrics) and the narrative (qualitative metrics).

In this post, we explore how these two types of metrics work together to measure impact and shape smarter PR strategies.

Quantitative Metrics: The Numbers

Quantitative PR metrics focus on hard numbers. These indicators help assess your return on investment (ROI). They offer you concrete evidence of how a campaign drives lead generation, audience growth, and engagement. Here are the quantitative metrics we track for clients.

Media Placements

Media placements measure visibility and media interest. Track the number of earned media stories across relevant media outlets and publications. For example, a hotel company might track placements in *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, regional business journals, and local news channels. Count separate placements in print and digital channels, even within the same outlet.

Impressions

Impressions represent the potential number of times a piece of content is seen. The key word in that definition is "potential". Impressions are not guaranteed consumption of content. It's a measure of exposure, not engagement. For example, if outlets with a combined audience of 2 million people pick up your press release, that's 2 million impressions. Tools like Cision and Meltwater can help track this metric.

Share of Voice (SOV)

SOV compares your media presence to competitors. A high SOV means your brand is standing out. For example, if your hotel brand appears in 30% of all hospitality-related mentions in your market, your SOV is 30%. Consistent visibility reinforces your brand's credibility and leads to

enhanced customer loyalty. Be aware that bots, fake accounts, and negative media attention can skew SOV. Tools like Brandwatch, Sprout Social, Talkwalker, Hootsuite, and Ahrefs can help measure it accurately.

Social Media Metrics

Social media metrics might include:

- Reach measures how many people see your content

- Likes is a measure of sentiment

- Comments and shares are measures of engagement.

In addition, tracking specific hashtags and monitoring brand mentions can add more insights into your campaign. For instance, a successful PR event for a resort might spike user-generated content and hashtags. Monitor each channel's analytics platform for these metrics or use a social listening monitoring tool like Meltwater, SproutSocial, Hootsuite, or Cision.

Website Metrics

Spikes in traffic and engagement after a media mention, influencer partnership, or campaign launch often signal PR success.

Engagement metrics might include:

- Unique visitors

- Page views

- Average time on page

- Key events such as downloading a form, viewing a video, or making a reservation.

For example, if a restaurant sees increased online reservations after a local news feature, that's clear evidence of campaign impact. Platforms like Google Analytics can analyze referral traffic and user behavior tied to specific PR pushes.

Pro Tip: There is a host of other quantitative metrics you can use. Don't get overwhelmed. Prioritize the four to eight quantitative metrics that make the most sense for your business.

Qualitative Metrics: Beyond the Stats

PR is most effective when it [tells a story](#). Storytelling captures attention. It evokes emotions and nurtures meaningful connections. You can't always measure connection with quantitative metrics. While hard data can demonstrate how far your message traveled, qualitative metrics show how

customers received it. These insights measure brand perception, credibility, and the emotional connection with your audience.

Sentiment Analysis

Contrary to popular sayings, not all PR is good PR. Sentiment analysis measures whether your brand mentions are positive, neutral, or negative. Tools like Brandwatch or Talkwalker use artificial intelligence and machine learning to understand the emotions and attitudes expressed in social media posts, news articles, and customer reviews. This can help you gauge public opinion and brand perception on any given day or after a PR push. For example, high volumes of positive sentiment after a hotel's sustainability campaign shows PR success. Sentiment analysis is also instrumental when managing a PR crisis.

Message Pull-Through

Message pull-through measures how well your earned media coverage reflects your brand messages. It goes beyond simply counting mentions. It examines whether reporters, influencers, and bloggers echo your brand themes and language. For example, influencers using brand language to describe a product and journalists repeating core messaging from a press release are indications of positive message pull-through. Tools like Onclusive and Muck Rack tag and track specific messaging elements across online mentions. Message pull-through is essential for brand consistency and reputation management. It ensures your investment in PR creates the right kind of visibility.

Quality of Coverage

It's not just how many placements you get, but where and how your story is covered. High-quality coverage comes from reputable outlets that align with your brand's audience and positioning. For some hotel brands, a feature in *Forbes Travel Guide* or *The Wall Street Journal* carries more authority and impact than a short mention in a local blog. For others, it might be the opposite.

Quality also includes story depth, which measures how detailed the article is, and alignment with your brand tone and values. Accuracy is also a critical quality measurement. For example, if your PR campaign centers on luxury wellness, coverage in a niche wellness magazine highlighting your spa's design, treatments, and philosophy is more valuable than a passing mention in a general travel round-up.

Strong quality coverage often has a longer-lasting impact than sheer volume. To measure quality, try tools like Cision or Meltwater. You can also create your own manual scoring system based on outlet authority, message inclusion, tone, and audience alignment.

Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility looks at how reliable and genuine an influencer is. It also considers whether they align with your brand's values and resonate with your audience. When influencers are credible, your partnership resonates with customers. Influencers who consistently produce genuine content and engage transparently tend to have audiences more likely to value and act on their recommendations. For a comprehensive guide on building an influencer marketing strategy that drives real ROI, read more insights here.

Audience Feedback

During a PR campaign, social listening and surveys offer direct insight into what people think, feel, and share about your brand. Audience feedback includes comments and direct messages on social media, online reviews, post-event surveys, and email replies. For example, if guests mention in a post-stay survey that they booked after reading a travel feature or seeing an influencer's Instagram story, that's a strong signal of PR effectiveness.

Social listening tools like Sprout Social or Meltwater can help identify recurring themes or concerns in online conversations. This critical information can inform your team to adjust messaging or strategy accordingly. Feedback also reveals unexpected reactions that formal media metrics might not capture. For example, positive mentions in hospitality Facebook groups or detailed guest reviews referencing recent PR campaigns can be a goldmine for qualitative insight.

Pro Tip: Use qualitative metrics to supplement quantitative data and uncover insights you might otherwise miss. The goal is to build a complete story that measures results and informs further decision making.

Why You Need Both

Numbers tell part of the story. Sentiment tells the rest.

Quantitative and qualitative metrics serve different, but equally important, purposes:

- **Quantitative tells you:** *How many? How much? How far?*

- **Qualitative answers:** *So what? How did it feel? Why did it matter?*

Used together, they provide a 360-degree view of your PR performance. For example, an influencer campaign could:

- Deliver 2 million impressions (quantitative), but negative social media feedback (qualitative)

- Or it may generate fewer impressions but also positive social media responses.

Quantitative Metrics Help You:

- Calculate ROI and demonstrate performance

- Justify budgets and optimize spending

- Set benchmarks and forecast results

Qualitative Metrics Help You:

- Refine messaging and ensure consistency

- Understand your audience on a deeper level

- Guide future campaigns, content, and even product development

This dual lens aligns your PR efforts with broader business goals, whether boosting sales, growing your business, or shaping brand reputation.

PR Success is about Reach AND Relevance

Both quantitative and qualitative metrics are necessary to tell the full story. One determines impact, the other shows influence. Used together, they offer business leaders the insight needed to justify investment, guide strategy, and build deeper connections with their customers.

Need help building a PR strategy that delivers both reach and relevance? Our Phase 3 PR team is here to [help you](#) connect strategy, storytelling, and data to drive tangible business outcomes.