DATA LITERACY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRCA

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This is a paper by the PRCA Innovation Forum about data literacy in public relations. It explores the use of data in public relations and ways in which it can be used to inform strategy, decision making, creative, content, execution, and measurement.

"A credible voice of insights is only possible with meaningful data. This paper paves the way for those willing to put the work in to be relevant to the c-suite by focusing on their organisation's overarching business goal. We need to meet the c-suite where they are focused and refrain from expecting them to take an interest in the activity level of comms and pr, which is still a dominant part of reporting. In short, equally important to data literacy is the ability to communicate the effectiveness of your initiatives in context to the overarching business objectives."

Johna Burke, Global Managing Director, AMEC

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DATA LITERACY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

An introduction to the application and use of data in public relations.

By Stephen Waddington

The digital transformation of media and organisations over the past 20 years has created huge volumes of data. This data provides new opportunities for public relations practitioners to understand and engage with audiences. It has also provided practice with the means to plan, measure and demonstrate its value.

Data Literacy in Public Relations has been researched and written by the PRCA Innovation Forum. It introduces the concept of data literacy in public relations and the opportunities that it creates.

The paper examines the importance of data in public relations and its application in listening and measurement. It explains how insights can be developed from a dataset and used as the basis of content creation and storytelling.

Data Literacy in Public Relations has been written for practitioners by practitioners. The paper includes a section on how to create a data-led culture within an agency or organisation, alongside a series of case studies. It also includes a useful list of commonly used public relations tools.

Thank you, all the contributors, and everyone who has supported this project. We hope that you find *Data Literacy in Public Relations* useful and look forward to your comments and feedback.

CHAPTER **02**

WHAT NUMBERS MATTER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Data should inform decision making and strategy for a public relations campaign.

By Andrew Bruce Smith

What you will learn:

- **The importance of setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at the outset of a project**
- **How to source data to inform the public relations planning process**
- **The importance of validating and verifying data to ensure its relevance and integrity**

Numbers and data analysis should play a vital role in every aspect of public relations. Every campaign should begin with goal setting and research and involve answering many important questions. We've set out some examples in the table below.

- **What audiences are we trying to reach?**
- **What data and insight do we have about these audiences?**
- **What is the objective of the campaign?**
- **Are we simply trying to reach a group of people?**
- **Or are we trying to change an opinion or behaviour?**

Table: Planning questions for public relations activity

In which case, how will we know what impact our work has had on influencing those outcomes? What will ultimate success look like? How do we decide what our goals and objectives are – and what numbers will determine whether we meet or exceed our targets?

Answering these questions requires data. Determining which data matter is one of the most important aspects of public relations work.

Let's explore audience research and some of the key questions we should probably be answering using data.

- **How many people are we trying to target?**
- **Where do they live?**
- **Where do they work?**
- **What media outlets do they pay attention to?**
- **What social media platforms do they use?**
- **Are they passive information consumers or active online participants?**
- **What do they search for on Google?**
- **What do they think and feel about issue X?**

Table: Characterising an audience for a public relations campaign

This is a small sample of the kind of questions that a public relations practitioner might want to answer to build a fully formed picture of a target audience. The more complete the picture of the audience, its opinions, and its behaviour, the better able a practitioner will be to make informed decisions about developing a strategic communications approach more likely to deliver the results desired. Every one of these questions will be answered by utilising data (where it exists).

Sourcing planning data

So, what criteria should practitioners use when deciding what numbers matter in relation to these questions? And where should they look to find the right numbers and data to use?

Two big questions are:

1. How has the data been captured?
2. How representative and accurate is it?

The reality of working with data is that the source is rarely 100% accurate. There is always going to be a range of errors.

For example, most of the major social media and digital platforms are providing numbers based on sampled data. *SimilarWeb* is a commonly used tool to provide insights into how many people visit specific websites. It does not have direct access to actual traffic numbers for any website but estimates them based on the user behaviour of a panel of users. It is admittedly a large sample of 100 million people, but this is only a fraction of the near 4.3 billion actual web users globally. The panel is representative of the overall audience, but it means the numbers themselves will not be 100% accurate. This same principle will generally apply to most data sets.

Strictly speaking, we don't just deal with numbers. Numbers and metrics are always paired with specific data dimensions.

Dimensions are attributes of your data. The dimension city, for example, indicates a location such as Paris or New York.

Metrics are quantitative measurements. They are always numbers. But metrics without an accompanying dimension are meaningless.

Common public relations data dimensions might include items such as media outlet, article headline, web page URL, or sentiment. Data metrics might include things such as media coverage reach, social media impressions, clicks, or click through rates (CTR).

Numbers and data are required to support various aspects of the overall public relations process. So where can the appropriate data be accessed?

Practitioners may wish to gather their own audience data. This could be done through use of third-party market research firms or self-service survey solutions such as Google Forms, SurveyMonkey or Typeform.

Media monitoring services will almost certainly be required to capture numbers and data relating to media coverage – online, print and broadcast. Some data sources are free – others will require the use of paid third party tools.

Typically paid-for data sources should provide a higher level of accuracy, granularity, and ease of access. Choice of what data and metrics are needed to ascertain whether goals are being achieved will have a bearing on what cost may be involved – and whether that is an acceptable price to pay.

When it comes to social and digital media, the platforms themselves will freely provide relevant data for properties owned or managed by a practitioner. For example, Twitter provides data on the number of impressions and reactions to individual Tweets. Of course, even though many social media metric terms are used interchangeably across all platforms, they may be defined differently in each case. Meta determines an impression to be 50% of post content appearing on screen for at least one second. On LinkedIn, a mobile impression only requires content to appear on screen for at least 300 milliseconds to count.

Data integrity and quality

In terms of which numbers matter, practitioners also need to guard against substituting answering an easier question than the one asked. When asked to quantify how much awareness has been driven, it might be tempting to look at impression numbers or media reach. But this is substituting answering the question of how much awareness with how much potential visibility did our message get. The quality of visibility and attention will also vary by channel. The quality of attention to a fleeting social media post will be very different to being fully engaged watching a television news bulletin.

Measuring awareness can only be meaningfully achieved by surveying the target audience or using a proxy such as measuring brand related searches on Google. Using brand mentions presupposes that practitioners are tracking and capturing this data related to brand search volume – using data provided by Google or third-party tools such as SEMRush or Ahrefs.

When formulating public relations goals and objectives, numbers and metrics are always involved.

They are normally associated with specific targets that will determine the success or otherwise of the campaign.

It is often helpful to take an outside view to determine what overall baselines and base rates exist before deciding what targets and objectives to set. Otherwise, there is a danger of pulling target numbers out of thin air that bear no relation to achievability or reality.

For example, research from media outreach firm Propel shows that the average response rate for email pitches to journalists globally is around 3%. This data is based on tracking millions of email pitches sent via the Propel PRM platform. Any media relations campaign that secures a higher than 3% email pitch response rate is better than average. Conversely, setting response rates far greater than the average reduces the likelihood they will be achieved. Practitioners thus need to guard against probability bias or the tendency to give undue weight to unlikely outcomes.

Email pitch rate response is a good example. Practitioners routinely assume that the likely response rate is always far higher than the established base rate. This leads to targets that are far less likely to be achieved and reduces the credibility of public relations work from a senior management perspective.

Data leads to better questions and answers

It is impossible to do any kind of meaningful and valuable public relations work without making use of numbers and data. The challenge for practitioners everywhere is in having a good grasp of what data and numbers are appropriate to support the relevant part of the process – as well as having a basic level of understanding of data accuracy and core statistical concepts such as sampling, probability, and base rates.

The good news is that practitioners don't need to get an advanced qualification in statistics. Those prepared to make the effort to gain a basic level of data literacy and ask and answer the right questions are far better placed to put their public relations activities on a much firmer footing and with a far higher likelihood of success.

CHAPTER 03

DESIGN A LISTENING AND MEASUREMENT STRATEGY

A best practice guide for the measurement of public relations activity

By Orla Graham and Steve Leigh

What you will learn:

- **A framework for building a measurement approach for public relations activity**
- **How to set measurable objectives based on business objectives for public relations activity**
- **Explore different types of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) including reputation and commercial metrics**

Before setting out on shaping your listening and measurement strategy, it's worth familiarising yourself with some basic principles. We won't repeat them here but take time to investigate AMEC's Barcelona Principles and the AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework. If these terms are familiar to you, read on. If not, some time spent establishing the basics will make reading the next section more useful.

Also, it's worth noting that measurement and evaluation works best when it is used as a process of continuous improvement. It should be a circular activity. We learn what works best so that we can refine and enhance plans and maximise the impact of available resources.

Finally, the principles set out are not just for use when the activity has been carried out. These also provide useful techniques to refine and shape a brief, question assumptions and test hypotheses. The best way to ensure successful results is to know what works before you begin.

Good measurement starts with clear objectives

It's impossible to measure success if you don't know what success looks like. That's not a revelation, but it is critical to successful communications, and successful measurement of those communications, to be able to clearly identify and articulate your objectives.

These objectives need to start at the top of the organisation.

1. What are the organisational objectives?
2. How does this cascade down to communications and to each communication discipline?

This isn't important just for good measurement – it's important for good communications, for good planning and for good business operations. Everyone and every team needs to be aligned on what they're trying to achieve, and how it ties back into the organisation's purpose and goals.

Whilst this may sound obvious, it's frighteningly common for public relations practitioners to struggle to identify the objectives they're working towards. Often, they'll cite key performance indicators (KPIs) specific to public relations, something incredibly vague, or nothing at all. If that's a struggle that you or your organisation faces, or if you want to make sure that you're on the right track with existing objectives, the table below sets out questions to consider.

1. What's the purpose of the organisation? Is it trying to sell things, change minds, or provide a service? **2. Drill down more – who are your competitors? Where do you currently sit in the market? Who is your audience?** **3. What does this mean for the public relations team? Is your goal increasing awareness, shifting perception, facilitating actions, or a combination of those?** **4. Who do you need to reach, what perception should your audience have because of your comms, and what do you want them to do after they've seen it?** **5. What are your activities, and do they all link to all the above?** **6. Do you have any existing data that you can leverage, such as brand tracking, benchmarking, and market research?**

Table: Planning questions for public relations activity

These questions may not always be easy to answer. Sometimes there isn't agreement or clarity over what you're trying to achieve. You might have executives who think the goal of the public relations team is to get the organisation on the front page of *The Daily Telegraph*, despite your target audience being 18-to-34-year-old women who earn less than £30k per year. But consistent focus on linking the objectives of the comms team to the objectives of the business is key to being able to identify the right metrics.

Frameworks are a critical tool in your armoury for being able to ensure that you've got clear, organisational-led objectives; activities which are purposeful and strategic; and metrics which help you to demonstrate this. A useful framework should consider your contextual Inputs (budgets, audiences, available data, external factors), and articulate your Objectives, Activities, Outputs and Outcomes. Nothing should go into the Framework if it doesn't link to the other sections. If you can't tie your activity to an objective, or find an output or outcome to measure it, then you shouldn't be doing it, because it isn't strategically valid.

However, it is all too easy to start throwing all sorts of metrics and activities into a framework and lose sight of what you are trying to do and why it matters. Which is why a model like See, Think, Do can be helpful.

Communication or public relations activity can be summed up as See, Think, Do. You want the right people to see your message in the media; you want them to think a certain way after seeing it; and you want them to do a certain thing as a result. This is admittedly a blunt and simplistic tool, but it can provide focus when considering objectives and metrics, and it ensures that you don't just focus on one area because it's easy to measure, while ignoring others.

It can also be customised to whatever the organisation's terminology is for the top end of the funnel such as awareness, reputation, or engagement. By overlaying this model on a framework, you start to make it much easier to draw a line from organisational objectives to comms activities to the metrics that can help prove them; you make it easier to turn that into a strong narrative on how you're achieving organisational impact; and you can start to put it into language that fits in with owned and paid comms activities, ensuring that earned media is understood as being just as strategically important and impactful as any other comms disciplines.

Identifying the right metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

So, what steps should you take to design your KPIs for each public relations brief?

1. Allocate a budget proportionate to need

Firstly, it's important to keep any measurement KPIs proportionate to the budget available.

Yes, you could get a monthly tracker of brand awareness and understanding amongst key audiences by carrying out regular, in-depth market research. But, unless your budget for measurement runs well into five figures per year, that's not going to be practical.

How much is proportionate? Well, that will depend on the value the information adds.

10% of total budget is often talked about as the standard allocation for a measurement and evaluation budget (and is the recommended allocation for UK public sector work). However, many practitioners will acknowledge that the true figure is often much lower – some reports suggest as low as 2.5% in the case of many FMCG brands.

In the case of a new product launch Mark Weiner (Cision Chief Insights Officer), in a recent industry roundtable, suggested that even 15% may be insufficient given the critical need to understand impact of launch and target future investment. Equally, 1% may be too much if it is to support a 'dying' brand that is soon to be retired.

Good consultancy should be about making the case for the appropriate level of investment. Understanding how the data will shape future activity and best support the client's organisational objectives. If a £100,000 measurement and evaluation budget adds £1 million in future sales, it is money well spent.

2. Make KPIs relevant to the organisation's objective

When designing a set of KPIs always ask yourself "so what?". How does this evidence show how our activity has supported the client's organisational objectives?

For example, if the client's objective is purely commercial and you report on non-commercial metrics, you will need to justify how they support the aim of securing a sale. That doesn't mean the metric isn't useful, just that you need to show how it fits into the customer journey.

It is useful to break metrics or KPIs into three categories:

a. **Effectiveness: evidence that shows that the public relations team has carried out its work effectively.**

b. **Reputation: evidence that shows how you are influencing and shaping perceptions towards achieving a desired outcome.**

c. **Commercial: evidence that shows an impact on sales – either directly or by starting potential customers on their journey to purchase.**

3. Effectiveness KPIs

These are the most common in traditional reporting, measurement, and evaluation. They would typically be classed as 'Outputs' in the AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework.

It is important that these aren't overlooked in building a dashboard of KPIs. They are the best indicator that the brief has been carried out competently and shows the most immediate return on the client's investment. Typical examples are set out in the table below.

Volume of coverage
Quality of coverage – classed by category of title, prominence, or relevance
Key message analysis
Product or category featured
Inclusion of links and the type of link – follow or no-follow **Authority of the website**
Estimated readership or monthly unique users

Table: Example KPIs for public relations activity

While these will be familiar to many, what is perhaps less frequently done is to treat these outputs as data.

Creating simple spreadsheets and data visualisation (Google Data Studio can be a good place to start) can allow you to start manipulating this data to create new KPIs and reports for clients.

The use of cross tabulations is a useful statistical technique for practitioners to learn. Put simply, this technique allows you to see how two different variables relate to each other.

Adding a time element to these data sets (plotting your results by week, month, or quarter) and you can begin to evidence the increased effectiveness of public relations activity, the impact of specific activity or campaigns or the changing nature of a brand's profile.

For example, using cross tabulation to track the estimated readership of coverage related to specific products or key messages over time. This might show how the potential audience of the brand's association with sustainability, good value or high quality has increased thanks to a change of strategy or the impact of a particularly creative execution.

If the organisational objective is to increase association of brand X as a 'green' product for example, this can be a powerful KPI to report to a client.

4. Reputation KPIs

Taking a step on from reporting basic effectiveness, reputation KPIs start to look at how your work is beginning to change perceptions and behaviours.

Such KPIs move us into the next stage of the AMEC Framework, looking at Out-takes, Outcomes, and Impact.

For some clients, the goal may be reputational, for example a not-for-profit client that is seeking to raise awareness, educate and inform.

However, even for those with a strictly commercial focus, reputation KPIs are often the crucial building blocks that lead to a sale.

Brand awareness and consideration: are potential customers aware of the brand or that it provides products / services for a specific need?
Understanding: are people aware of the key features or benefits?
Sentiment of brand profile: will people researching the brand find evidence of positive reviews or customer experiences.
Reputation drivers for the category: how well does the brand profile match the desired attributes of a particular product? For example, if the customer's key motivation is a low price, is this the perception that has been created?

Table: Reputational KPIs

Such reputation KPIs should be a key territory for practitioners. Unlike other forms of marketing, public relations creates a brand profile that is passed through the filter of journalistic interpretation or creates a response from the public that will go on to positively influence their peers.

Educating clients on the role such reputation KPIs play in the customer journey, is a critical part of building an effective approach to measurement and evaluation.

Later in this report there is detail on some of the tools available to gather this evidence. You will see that while traditional market research still plays an important role (audience surveys are still the gold standard by which to learn current levels of awareness, understanding and perception), these can increasingly be supplemented by digital tools and techniques. These can help explain why particular views are held, the momentum behind a brand's rise or fall, or help track and understand specific customer reactions and experiences.

It is worth exploring more about emerging digital 'share metrics' as well as reading the recent PRCA Innovation Forum's *Beyond Share of Search: What Matters to Public Relations.*

Behavioural and commercial KPIs

Finally, building KPIs that show tangible Outcomes or Impact are a powerful addition to any measurement and evaluation framework.

For commercial clients these will often focus on showing potential customers moving towards a point of purchase. But the same techniques can be useful for not-for-profit clients where the goal is a behavioural change.

The earlier comments about allocating a proportionate budget are perhaps most relevant to this set of KPIs.

Direct commercial attribution back to public relations activity can be an expensive process. It can also be fraught with difficulties. For example, how can you attribute a sale solely to activity when other factors will also have influenced the ultimate decision? Also, how can you track highly considered purchases that might take months or years to come about (e.g., the purchase of a car or house)?

Once again, the key is to be more flexible with your thinking and find measurable points along the path that ultimately lead to a sale. For each client and sector these may be different, but some possible KPIs are set out in the table below.

Impact on search visibility (especially for high-intent, non-branded search terms – e.g., which is the best xxx, or what is the best xxx for under £50?)
Impact on online metrics – traffic, leads, goals
Commercial impact of PR-driven traffic – revenue, transactions, conversion rate, average order value

Table: Commercial KPIs

Building such KPIs into your activity can be simpler than you might expect. Also, the promise of direct evidence of the commercial impact of public relations can help unlock larger client budgets for measurement and evaluation.

Once again, tools will be covered later in this report, but to provide some food for thought it can be worth investing in tools or training that would normally be considered the preserve of SEOs or digital marketers. Public relations is a significant driver of online visibility and search and should be measured as such. Learning how to navigate Google Analytics is a good starting point.

Also, making use of call tracking software or creating PR-only landing pages can be a great way to track which customer journeys have been triggered by a public relations intervention.

Finally, learning about statistical correlation and causation might be a step too far for many, but can be used to track the impact of activity (e.g., coverage for a specific product or SKU) on other commercial indicators such as site traffic, 'add to basket' or 'size of basket' measures. With such methods, the longer they are employed the more evidence you can build to move from claims that public relations activity "may" have had an impact to saying that activity has "very likely" had an impact.

Creative approaches to measurement

Finally, be bold in your exploration of potential KPIs and how you use data. No two clients or briefs are the same and tweaking a tried and tested approach may deliver a better result for that client's needs.

Also, while there are good case studies and practices to follow, the AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework is only a framework. It doesn't dictate what KPIs you use. Just that they are legitimate, relevant, and useful. No measure is perfect and if yours is transparent and logical, it is just as legitimate as any other.

CHAPTER **04**

IDENTIFYING A PUBLIC AND LISTENING TO CONVERSATIONS

An approach for identifying and listening to a public.

By Sophie Coley and Steve Leigh

What you will learn:

- **Different approaches to listening and understanding a public**
- **Three examples of listening approaches: surveys, social media, and search**
- **Filtering data by audience, content, sentiment, and behaviour**

Once you've designed a measurement strategy, you need to find sources for that data. This presents new challenges; how to identify your audience and how best to extract meaningful data from them.

In this section we set out several methods to gain this insight. Ranging from traditional to the very new.

Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. There is no definitive 'right' answer. Choose the right approach for your needs by focusing on what you are trying to learn. For example,

- Out-takes: responses and reactions from your target audience.
- Outcomes: the effect on your target audience.
- Impact: how have these impacted on the main organisational objective?

Surveys

The most obvious method to extract data from your public is through a survey.

This is still the 'gold standard' to gain statistically robust measures on levels of brand awareness, understanding and declarations of intent (i.e., "I plan to…").

It also allows you to pick specific audiences, selecting survey panels by demographic profiles or based on other factors relevant to your campaign (e.g., people working in specific sectors or who are in that market for a specific product or service).

There are also services, such as Global Web Index that provide access to recurring consumer surveys that may prove useful (although these are often more suited to audience profiling rather than campaign measurement).

As with any research method, surveys are only as reliable as the quality of the design. Therefore, it is important to build your skills in this area or gain input from an experienced research professional.

Three areas are a challenge for public relations measurement:

1. If you are seeking to measure change you may need to carry out several surveys over time to track how awareness, beliefs and behaviours evolve. This can make post-campaign evaluation challenging.

2. Understanding attribution – surveys are very good at answering the 'what' but can sometimes struggle to show 'why'. For example, "do you know this brand and what its strengths are?" may be fine. But people may struggle to tell you "Why?" they know this or whether this perception has strengthened or weakened from six months ago.

3. Very targeted campaigns can also be a problem. If your audience is niche or a high value (business leaders for example), size of sample or cost per interview can easily become prohibitive.

For these reasons, other methods are increasingly being used.

Social media listening

Digital sources provide access to a wealth of data that often show the out-takes and outcomes that PRs are looking for.

Social media is one such source. For certain topics, there can be a significant amount of content that indicates engagement, emotional response, and areas of interest (e.g., what aspects of a new product most interest people – price, function, sustainability?).

While the audiences behind this data may not be strictly representative of the public as a whole or statistically verifiable, the scale of content at least provides significant variety and independence in the audience sample.

By tracking changes, trends, and patterns there is much to gain from harnessing these sources.

For example, the timeline inherent in digital data (often showing the

exact time and date published) makes it possible to track change over time. It can also allow attribution back to specific activity, tracking responses to an exact announcement or event.
Responses may even be made directly to an article or piece of coverage, allowing you to see exactly how that piece of content stimulated a response.

It is also worth remembering that such a profile is not only a measure of people's experiences and attitudes but is also influencing new audiences. For many people, their first introduction to a new brand will come from a report from someone posting about it online. It is therefore also a good measure of how a brand is being perceived.

Filtering by audience

Often, such conversation can be filtered by demographic details. If people – in their social profile or posts – declare their age, profession, location for example, such data can be used to filter content only coming from that type of profile.

Tools may contain their own social panels or allow you to design your own (e.g., by areas of interest), allowing you to create unique audience insights.

Filtering by content

It can also be useful to focus on specific topics, particularly for niche areas.

For example, in a survey it might be very hard to create a robust sample of people with a rare medical condition. However, by tracking social media or online content, you can quickly gather the experiences of such groups as they relate their stories to fellow sufferers in public forums.

This method can also show you where such conversations are taking place. For example, we were able to create an insightful report by analysing the conversations of gig-delivery within subreddits.

Filtering by sentiment and emotion

It may also be useful to analyse audiences by the nature of their response. For example, only those people delighted or disgusted by a particular theme.

People who are 'fans' or 'haters' of a particular subject can provide valuable insight.

For example, a company seeking to understand its brand as an employer will be able to learn how it is being talked about as a place to work through an analysis of reviews and social media.

Revealed behaviour: search listening

Despite estimates suggesting that 5.6 billion Google searches are performed worldwide every day, search data remains a largely, often untapped source of consumer insight.

Marketers who are tasked with reaching and converting potential customers via more performance-led channels such as SEO and PPC will regularly delve into the data that Google publishes via its Keyword Planner tool (or other, independent tools like SEMrush and Ahrefs) to guide their strategies, but the data could and should be used equally by marketers with goals focused on communication. That's because so many of us turn to Google in key life moments - from the mundane to the most important - daily and as a result it often holds the most candid consumer truths.

Because search listening is a relatively juvenile practice, particularly compared to social listening, there's a much smaller set of tools on the market to help uncover the data. That said, Google Trends and AnswerThePublic are two very user-friendly and often fruitful options which you can get going with immediately.

Google Trends is Google's own platform and is free to use, with no restrictions on users/searches. It serves up anonymised, sampled search data, scored on an index (rather than giving absolute search volumes). It's great for comparing relative interest in topics or search terms and enables you to cut the data in several ways, including by country and by period (which can be as custom as you want/need). It also reveals trending searches relating to what you input. At the time of writing this, the UK is in a heatwave and the cost-of-living crisis continues to loom, with news this week that a pack of Lurpak butter has reached more than £7. Google Trends data says that over the past 7 days, the following search trends have emerged:

Heatwave essentials

- **'Paddling pool Tesco' searches are up 1700%**
- **'Asda paddling pool' searches are up 1050%**
- **'Asda fans' searches are up 350%**
- **'Tesco sun lounger' searches are up 250%**

Lurpak

- **'Lidl lurpak butter' searches are up 600%**
- **'Lurpak Sainsburys' searches are up 400%**
- **'Lurpak prices' searches are up 300%**
- **'Tesco butter' searches are up 100%**

AnswerThePublic is not a Google platform, but it scrapes the suggestions Google and other search engines make to users as users start typing. You can treat this data as 'trending' searches. After you enter a seed term (e.g. 'supermarket'), it'll simulate you typing that seed plus a host of question words (i.e. 'why supermarket', 'what supermarket', 'which supermarket', etc.), prepositions (i.e. 'supermarket near', 'supermarket with', 'supermarket for', etc.), comparison words (i.e. 'supermarket and', 'supermarket like', 'supermarket versus', etc.) and the entire alphabet (i.e. 'supermarket a', 'supermarket b', 'supermarket c', etc.) and serve up all the current suggestions based on those combinations. At the time of writing, top searches include around supermarkets, served up by AnswerThePublic include:

- **Which supermarket has lurpak butter on offer**
- **Which supermarket is cheapest**
- **Which supermarket has Kenco coffee on offer**
- **Which supermarket has lamb on offer**
- **Why supermarket shelves are empty**
- **How supermarkets manipulate you**
- **How supermarket alarms work**
- **How supermarkets adjust their prices**

These give a definite flavour of what's front of mind for many consumers currently and hint at some topics which warrant further exploration - either via further search listening or via social or survey data - for example, distrust of supermarkets and their pricing.

AnswerThePublic will let you run two or three free searches per day. A paid-for account gives you access to more sophisticated features such as being able to track and receive alerts around changes in search behaviour.

Benefits of search data for planning	
Candid insights	Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, author of *Everybody Lies*, says that while most of us lie - be it to friends, lovers, doctors, in surveys or to ourselves - we tend not to lie to Google because by telling the truth we can get to the information we really need. Equally, the searches we perform are anonymous; where our social posts can readily be attributed to us by other users of the platform, we're on, the things we type into Google remain anonymous to other internet users. This anonymity leads us to be more candid.
Current insights	Google is constantly capturing and identifying trends in search data. To see this in action, type something like 'will it' or 'who is' into Google and look at the suggestions that appear before you hit search. Compare this daily over the course of a week and you'll see Google feed in new suggestions that reflect consumer behaviour, as it changes. Around breaking news stories, you'll see search suggestions change even hourly.
Representative insights	Google is used by the breadth of the population, from children through to pensioners. Search trends can be used as a proxy for a nat. rep. sample with some degree of confidence in the data, where trends on channels like TikTok or Instagram will have a definite demographic skew. Equally, since we don't only search when in 'consumer' mode, search data can hold insights for those working in B2B fields as well as B2C.
Limitation of search data	
No audience segmentation	Where surveys and some social listening platforms will enable you to go looking for insights relating to a specific demographic, the anonymous nature of search data makes this impossible when search listening. Google's Keyword planner enables you to pull search data at a city level, but it's typically better for more overtly commercial search topics.
Difficulty with semantic distinctions	As can be the case with social listening, if you're looking for insights around a brand named after a common noun you may struggle with search data. Google Trends might enable you to select the appropriate topic (i.e., you can select 'apple' as a fruit or a technology company', but this might not be the case for lesser-known brands and AnswerThePublic will give you data relating to both which you'll need to export into a spreadsheet and sanitise yourself.

Table: Strengths and weaknesses of search data that should considered as part of a planning process

CHAPTER 05

WHAT IS POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WITH TOOLS AND WHAT ARE THEIR LIMITATIONS?

An agency and a vendor perspective on the application of tools for measurement.

By Stella Bayles and James Crawford

What you will learn:

- **There is no single tool for measurement in public relations. A tool stack is needed**
- **Data sources from different sources can be aggregated into a dashboard to give a single viewpoint**
- **How to use a test and learn approach to incorporating tools within your public relations workflow**

Tools and tech stacks are increasingly important for the public relations industry. Despite ever-growing scope and complexity, there is still no silver bullet as every client has different objectives. Public relations can be used in many ways to achieve a broad range of outcomes.

In this section, James Crawford, AMEC board director and managing director of PR Agency One, and Stella Bayles, director of CoverageBook, aim to bring the subject to life by looking at this question from the point of view of tool user and vendor.

As both a vendor and a purchaser of tools, the comparison of their views provides an interesting perspective.

James Crawford, tool user
The opinion of an agency founder and managing director

As both a board director at AMEC and the managing director of a leading public relations agency, I've been collecting software licences like they are going out of fashion. Our annual software bill continues to expand as we increase the complexity of our measurement offering. Without tools, reporting is not impossible but very difficult.

Nowadays, the modern agency is often pulling together data from tens of different tools and sources and aggregating them into a single view or report.

Any agency or in-house team needs access to a tech stack, either directly or via a measurement professional.

Bridging the data literacy gap

Tools can help bridge the data literacy gap, but they can make it worse too. There can be an over reliance on off the shelf data and a lack of actual analysis, or a trust that the software's own proprietary code and approach is right when that is not always the case.

Tools in isolation cannot solve the problem of data literacy or measurement; training is needed to ensure tools are used correctly and reporting is accurate.

At their worst, tools can lead to "chart porn" which can superficially look great but is low on insight. However, used well, the insights can prove our effectiveness and safeguard budgets.

Many tools only have one or two key features or datasets, and data needs to be exported into a database or data visualisation tool. Often, vendors are bolting on new features in a race for feature parity with other tech businesses which can add complexity and challenges for those with low data literacy or technical competency. The key is to know which features really matter and focus on those.

Tools that provide exports of data are the most helpful as these allow users to aggregate their own data into bespoke reports

Increasingly, licensing costs of software are a barrier to entry for smaller agencies, but free and low-cost tools do exist, such as Google Data Studio and Google Analytics. Often, someone who has learned to use the available free tools can be far more analytical and insightful than another who is relying on technology alone to solve all their problems.

Stella Bayles, a tech vendor
The opinion of a vendor

Having been on an interesting career journey from practitioner to digital marketing strategist, both agency-side to now providing tech to the public relations industry; I understand the challenges teams face with keeping up with new tech trends and being data-literate.

Be aware, but beware of magpie syndrome

There can be a tendency to get excited about a new data point or metric. It's important to keep abreast of new tech and best practices (I wouldn't be here, and you wouldn't be reading this paper otherwise) but remember to remain objective.

The perfect metric for one team has its own context. There may be similarities, but it will be just a similarity - There should never be a cookie cutter approach to insight and measurement, because we're not all working for the same client with the same objective.

Yes, the industry is behind other areas of marketing in data literacy but that doesn't mean we are not drowning in data options. There is more data than ever available to us and that is only set to grow, so keep your head.

Remain clear on what it is you're trying to track and prove, and only change your process, tech, or data points if you're confident it will bring more value to your challenge and won't affect your on-going data story of success.

A good way to organise your decision is by assessing new tools and their data as vitamins or painkillers.

Vitamins are "nice to have," but not "need to have." Often these are tools that provide value-add insight or have a new technique that could be useful but haven't been tested through your workflow yet. Vitamins are optional, are preventive and could become essential but you need to find your way with it. A painkiller is an essential piece of technology that is needed to solve a problem quickly.

One CoverageBook customer discovered us through their annual 'automation week'; One week in the year all members of the agency department team would switch off client work (as much as possible) and focus on reviewing and improving workflow and tech use.

Each member of the team would be assigned an area of work from insight and strategy to activation, reporting and measurement. They would review the processes, research what's new and available to their area, test, and report back to the team if they felt it could be automated or improve their service.

The team member assigned to coverage tracking was searching for quicker ways to get coverage metrics into their tracker excel sheet and stumbled across CoverageBook. In that week the team refreshed several tools and cut down on over 40 hours of manual work through switching to new technology. Real painkillers!

Consideration: Is it good enough to switch?

When considering new shiny technology that ticks a lot of client and team objectives it can seem like a no-brainer to switch right? It is if you have considered dirty data.

Dirty data! No!

Apart from sounding like a famous song by an artist who shall now not be named, it's also an important part of your consideration in switching tools because clean public relations data is critical.

Tracking activity over time is the only way to identify insights on activity. Whether you have been tracking publication traffic, impressions, influence, Domain Authority (DA), links, SERPs exposure, coverage views… you get the idea…Consistency is king! It is only over long time periods can you begin to gauge upwards trends of success or areas for strategy change and improvement.

If you switch tech, it's likely you're switching data providers and if you're switching data providers you could ruin your chances of pulling insights at a later stage. Even when it appears that some tools provide the same metrics there could be slight differences in how the data is captured and that slight difference will make your whole evaluation incorrect.

For example, you may be tracking page views as a metric and the new tech you're considering reports impressions, they sound similar, but they are not the same. Switching will mean you can no longer track increased views over time to an important page you're promoting.

Similarly, tools can provide proprietary metrics that have similar labels but have different formulas. Again, switching means you are not comparing like to like and will make insights overtime very difficult!

When you're considering the new tool, dig a little deeper and ask:

- Who the data providers are
- How the data is captured
- What period and when is it logged
- If it is a score, proxy, or estimation, how is it calculated
- Has any of the above changed in the last two years

Engage: Who is making data decisions?

As well as understanding the data points, original providers and how it is collected and logged it's also important to know those metrics have been chosen for the tool.

At CoverageBook for example, there was a reason domain authority, link counts and estimated views on media and social coverage were selected for reports; The tech was originally built to solve a problem we experienced in an agency at the time when our communications team was required to report to multiple stakeholders with varying marketing goals across clients every Friday. We needed a more automated approach, so CoverageBook was born in 2014. We soon realised it was a shared challenge for many other teams when CoverageBook became a public tool. That said, your stakeholders might require different data each week.

Other tech providers may have travelled a different path to creating their tech, ask them what that was. Not only will you better understand the data you're being provided, but it will also give you an insight into what might come next too.

Through these questions, you'll find the perfect match in provider for you. Who is behind the tool, what's their experience and knowledge, what's their drive and passion for our industry, does it match with your own?

Commit and become a super-user

Once you commit to your tool, ensure you use it to its full potential. Be curious and challenge your tech providers as to why they believe in their metrics. Ask what insight the metrics can provide and if it can be associated with other levels of measurement.

Ask for ways other customers are using the data from the tool. Inspiration on uses of a metric could enhance your processes too. The public relations measurement team at Diageo for example, don't just use the 'Estimated Coverage Views' metric in CoverageBook as an awareness metric. It tracks estimated views on media and social coverage and then uses it as a proxy for impressions. This helps it compare spend and views on earned activity against owned content and paid activity.

What is the grand plan?

Ask what the future looks like for the tool. Do they have investors? Can they share a roadmap? Are they planning on focusing on a particular approach to insight and measurement or a sector or type of PR? This will help you understand your relationship with the tech.

Investors could lead to fast growth or a sale; this could mean a change in experience in support and potentially your metrics. They may not share this information but it's worth exploring!

If your tool is planning new features, get an understanding on the area of focus; could the features or data help you measure a new area of work, impress new stakeholders, or help you expand a new offering.

There are a lot of possibilities when you grow your relationship with your vendor, so have a chat. Some of us are nice.

CHAPTER 06

TRANSLATING DATA INTO INSIGHTS TO INFORM STRATEGY

Data is the source of strategy and insight in public relations.

By Alex Judd and Allison Spray

What you will learn:

- **Understand what an insight is and how it is the basis of strategy**
- **A methodology for developing an insight from data**
- **How to develop and communicate a public relations strategy**

No matter what kind of project you're running, your sector (or specialism), chances are you have faced what many professionals dread: a wall of statistics, charts, and data points. A litany of information pointing you towards something. But what are you going to do with it all?

Resist the urge to find a word cloud, throw it on a slide and give yourself a pat on the back.

Instead, take a different path, start your journey to find an insight.

Getting to insight – and planning what you'll do once you have found it – are ultimately creative endeavours. And starting with insight is crucial to creating a game-changing campaign because done correctly, an insight defines the bullseye for great work.

But moving from data to insight is no small feat. You must make a leap – from what you know from the data, to what you need to do.

How to translate data into insight?

Let's start with the data that you'll need to collect.

Most of us are familiar with the data we collect to understand brand and business challenges: you could look at how the brand positions itself; use media and social listening to understand how they and their competitors are talked about; look at surveys to understand how they're perceived.

But to get to a useful insight, you also need to understand the human problem you're trying to solve. As you get into the research, summarise the problem you're trying to solve in a sentence or two.

Likely, you'll need to understand what your target audience are saying – and what they're doing. You look at how people search; what they talk about on social media; at what is happening more broadly in culture right now. Don't be afraid of the wall of data coming at you. Instead, embrace it and look for the patterns, and for the things that stand out and move in the opposite direction.

If you want to push deeper, understanding how academics are writing on a particular human challenge (How do we get people to eat more healthily? Get vaccinated? Be more neighbourly?) is particularly useful. Google Scholar is a great free resource for accessing papers across the social sciences.

It's worth noting that to get to a useful insight your audience will need to be clearly defined. If that hasn't come through in the brief you've received from the client, take the time at this step to clearly define your audience.

What is an insight?

You've likely heard that word before, in many forms. Perhaps phrases like "powerful insights" as if they're a mystical art harnessed by wizards. Or maybe you've seen the word "insights" above that slide with the word cloud on it. There's clearly a misunderstanding on what that word means, so let's start with a definition.

This is subjective, but the best out there is a quote from Jeremy Bullmore:

"Why is an insight like a refrigerator? Because the moment you investigate it, a light comes on"

That's the key to it; when you're writing your analysis, ask yourself: "does a light come on?" Have you found something which feels novel, but inescapably true? If the answer is yes, then chances are you have found an insight.

To bring that to life a little more, let's distinguish between a fact, an observation, and an insight:

- A fact that people feed their dogs in the morning and at night. That's useful, perhaps, but I don't see the light coming on.
- An observation that people feed their dogs at dinner and breakfast time. We've put more thought into this one, we've noticed it's not just the day-to-day, it's the occasion too. It's more interesting, there's more we can do with it, but we can push it further…

- An insight that people feel guilty eating in front of their dogs. See that light come on? Now we're in interesting territory

Uncovering that level of insight requires work. You need to add that human layer on top of the data you're looking at – whether through intuition or speaking to the audience directly. But it's always worth the effort.

Once you've found your insight, you can move forward to developing your strategy. In this case, we don't mean a massive document outlining next steps down to the tactical level. This is about articulating your creative strategy.

There are a few common ways to articulate a strategy, but one of the most common is **GET/WHO/TO/BY**:

GET	Target audience
WHO	Human problem
TO	Desired response
BY	One message or action

Table: GET/WHO/TO/BY, Julian Cole

Your research above has provided the first pieces. The insight provides the clue to how you can solve the human problem – through something the brand will do or provide.

If you're looking for examples of what this looks like, you can check out writers like Mark Pollard or Julian Cole. Here's an example from Cole's piece, "How to use the creative brief GET/WHO/TO/BY":

GET: Gen Xers music lovers

WHO: think Spotify is a music streaming platform designed for the youth

TO: Reconsider Spotify as a song library for all music listeners, including them

BY: Showing that Spotify allows them to reconnect with good times no matter how much the world may have changed

Source: How to use the creative brief GET/WHO/TO/BY, Julian Cole

If you tackle that wall of data, charts – and yes, maybe even a word cloud or two – and push beyond the statistics to real insight, you can see the value for creating truly impactful campaigns.

Embrace data in your planning. We promise, if you look hard enough, the light will come on.

CHAPTER 07

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

A how-to guide to creating a data culture within a public relations team.

By Stella Bayles and James Crawford

What you will learn:

- **Understand the importance of culture in developing and driving the adoption of tools and new workflow**
- **Practical approaches to driving the adoption of tools and improving data literacy within teams**
- **Three case studies of data literacy within public relations teams**

Anecdotally, data literacy within public relations practice is poor. There are many reasons for this, but it must change.

Historically, the written word has been at the forefront of the agency skillset. Those who were good writers, had a nose for a story and good contacts within the earned media could build large and successful agencies or successful in-house teams. Things have changed, with search, social media and analytics becoming more integrated into the public relation playbook but still data literacy in public relations practice is still not as valued as it should be.

Those organisations that have built reputations rooted in good use of insights, measurement and evaluation are arguably innovators and are setting an example to their industry peers.

Technology has also been a catalyst for measurement. We can access free and paid-for tools which can afford us generous insights but also, if used badly, become a tick box exercise of chart porn with no actionable insight.

Arguably, what matters in data literacy is culture and leadership. No matter the size or the scale of the organisation, if data literacy and a culture of insight, measurement and evaluation isn't fostered through the organisation, then the adoption of technology becomes futile and perhaps nothing more than a tick box exercise to pass the hygiene test when scrutinised by stakeholders and the c-suite.

In the UK, agencies range in size from large £50 million turnover organisations to small agencies of perhaps two or three people. In-house teams are different and can range from one person reporting into marketing to teams of hundreds.

No matter the size and scale of these organisations, our research has shown that data literacy is progressing slowly and perhaps more slowly than in other disciplines such as digital marketing, where analytics is key to progress.

But what can public relations leaders do about it? To date, data literacy is being nurtured in four ways.

1. **Investment from larger organisations in building teams of specialists in data and analytics**
2. **Investment in technology**
3. **PR agencies building up niche offerings in where data and insight is core to their consultancy model**
4. **Small agencies or individual consultants trying to improve their skills**

Table: Four approaches to improving data literacy in a communication team

Larger organisations with data teams

In an agency sense, larger organisations with data teams feature in the top 10 of the PR Week Top 150, but some pockets of innovation do exist in the top 50. Other consultancy businesses, such as Arup or Accenture, are building up their data and analytics teams. On the client side, the industry is reporting that data and insights teams are being built in house, following innovation within the agency space.

Larger organisations have invested in measurement and data and have clients willing to pay to solve the big challenges that they face. They have the resource to invest in their tech stack and are courted by the big data and tech providers, who are often willing to build out their tech based on their need.

These organisations have heads of insights and analysts to help solve the problem. Some have created their own proprietary tech or aggregated data approach which is attractive to clients and to talent wanting to work within that data and insights team.

These teams use data in a variety of ways. They use data to pitch, to plan and to evaluate They use data to differentiate and shape strategy.

The general approach is that any technology used is accompanied with a large dollop of human consultancy to interrogate the software and data, and to aggregate the data. The skill in these organisations is often in the consultancy and the data storytelling.

Technology can only go so far, and the art is in how this data is analysed and the insight is reported back to the client.

There are problems with siloing of expertise. Some firms report that, in worst case scenarios, specialists are wheeled into campaigns too late and account teams lack the understanding and skills to account manage data-driven activities. This is very much a tick box approach to solving the problem, where analysis is seen as a hygiene factor for quality or procurement of services, rather than being core to the company's offering.

There can often be a lack of innovation within larger companies. Often, innovation is bought in or acquired through M&A. There is nothing wrong with this of course and M&A is an important driver of innovation in the first place. But for those looking for real innovation, it is often found in the martech or small consultancy space.

Having a specialist data team often means that their practitioner teams fail to build up their data literacy and analytical skills. Some don't have the opportunity to do so and some lack the appetite because they "don't enjoy maths" or "they prefer creative tasks."

Technology driven approach

Some organisations have solved the problem of data literacy by looking for off the shelf solutions provided by research and tech vendors.

Often, these organisations have a small data and analytics team, or they don't have one and are expecting the technology to do the heavy lifting.

This investment in tech has been effective when coupled with training to increase the competency of account teams. Account teams have access to a variety of tools allowing them to provide actionable insights to clients.

It works best when there are one or two senior people within the business with an understanding of what needs to be measured and a level of data literacy. This has led to training for all staff members, increasing data literacy overall. But in some cases, it has led to overreliance on technology as a quality assurance badge rather than a true means of improving data literacy, competency, and outputs. At worst, reporting is low on insight and is pretty much simply "chart porn" offering little or no value.

Sometimes there is an underinvestment in tech or an overreliance on one tool to be the Swiss army knife that solves all problems. From time-to-time technology is also not tailored enough to provide insights linked to a challenge or objective. There is a clear need for human involvement in this process, and those involved need to be trained and understand how to both analyse data and tell the story the data presents,

Sometimes technology only ever gives us one single view when more than one data view is needed for a robust outcome.

Culture and leadership approach

There are organisations where data and insight are at the heart of the offering of the business, and experimentation, learning and training are encouraged.

There is an investment in technology, and training and knowledge are used across the organisation instead of just within a measurement specialist team.

Investment in technology and training has helped increase data literacy because the insights used at planning and evaluation stages are central to the business strategy.

This approach sometimes sees an organisation hire their own data specialists but also support their practitioners on improving their own skills.

Research and innovation have occurred, and these organisations might have developed their own proprietary tools but also use existing technology to create aggregated data reports.

Case study 1: Lynn Group

The three-year old behavioural science agency is using a planning framework to provide rigour to all its work.

Shayoni Lynn

Lynn Group is a behavioural science communications consultancy working with clients internationally on behaviour change campaigns, anti-mis/disinformation research and strategies, and evaluation solutions. It is a deeply data-led firm with research and insights at the heart of all activity.

The agency was founded by Shayoni Lynn to create an agency solution that embraced a scientific approach to communications strategy - without compromising on innovation, creativity, or outcomes. Therefore, Lynn undertakes primary research as part of all projects – a fundamental initial phase as part of the consistently used proprietary Lynn Framework at the agency.

All data interpretation, analysis and integration are undertaken in-house. Lynn is also the first UK communications consultancy that has embedded experimentation consistently into all campaigns; it rapidly tests creative and message solutions to confirm research hypotheses and to establish confidence in replication.

Team Lynn is, by nature, data obsessed with high proficiency in how to use it, code it, interpret it, and integrate it. Data literacy is a key pillar of Lynn's ongoing learning and development programme. It takes effort and commitment from Lynn's senior team to maintain this level of consistency, relevancy and immediacy of knowledge and they proactively ensure the team have time to consistently develop their capability and enforce their learning with confidence.

Data led insights, strategy and creative

Capability and interest can become barriers to adoption as communicators may feel that a data-led approach stifles creativity. However, it is important that organisations and leadership champion and embed data literacy at their firms as the importance and reliance on data – including the ability to code, interpret and integrate – will only increase with more clients expecting high data literacy from their agencies, and a mandate from their C-suite to evidence the impact of communications and campaigns. Other challenges include pace, changing client needs, urgency of client needs, changing nature of data sources including but not limited to digital media and impact from changing social media algorithms.

Lynn is set up very differently to other consultancies in our industry. As a remote first business, Lynn houses three key specialisms: The BS (behavioural science) Unit, The Misinformation Cell, and Campaigns Management. They work in an integrated manner to support Lynn's practices: Lynn Health, Lynn Planet, and Lynn Change. The firm is founded on the mission to improve and save lives; all activity at Lynn is powered by behavioural science which fundamentally indicates the importance and adoption of data across the business.

Data literacy is a key skillset that communicators should embrace and develop their capabilities in. It does not stifle creativity; Lynn's multi award winning creative campaigns that have delivered deep societal change prove that (e.g., #DontMissYourVaccine – PRmoment, CIPR Excellence, PR Week winner – improved vaccination take-up in key audiences by 77.8% in 4 weeks). Understanding, engaging with, and applying data into practice will result in more purposeful, creative ideas – ideas with impact, ideas that can change lives, and ideas that may be that little bit counterintuitive.

Case study 2: H+K

Adopting a data led approach in a 3,500-person global agency requires a combination of upskilling and a specialist data and analytics team.

Allison Spray

H+K is one of the world's leading global communications companies, partnering with clients across more than 80 offices globally in more than 40 markets. We draw on our heritage, coupled with a deep belief in the power of creativity and innovation, to constantly renew the capabilities that empower us to drive growth for our clients, help them manage risk, and defend and improve their reputations.

It is within this context that we restructured the agency's approach to data, starting in 2017. Since then, we've undergone a remarkable journey. Starting with a business strategy that puts data at the heart of everything we do, we built a global team with core product offerings designed to enable our clients to better understand their audiences, build insights, and evaluate performance.

Why was this so important? Because data is the heart of H+K's joined-up approach. Within our hubs, you'll find analysts and measurement specialists working alongside content and publishing strategists, film directors, and designers – all focused on the same client-centric goals. Whether it's finding the right moment to speak to your target audience, identifying the white space a brand can own, or proving the value of creative communications, Data + Analytics at H+K is all about grounding our work in data.

Data literacy journey

We developed a two-pronged approach to ensure not just the 65+ strong data team, but the 3,500+ strong agency, is data and intelligence driven:

1. Supporting the basics. Enabling teams with the right tools and training to use data in day-to-day work

2. Continuing innovation. Building bespoke products using the right partners

To tackle our first pillar, we started by focusing on tools. Getting the right data was key to ensuring we were enabling our data-led strategy. Our focus was to ensure that H+K staff had consistent access to best-in-class social, influencer, and audience data as a starting point. Training for all users of the tools was a mandatory part of onboarding. In addition, we built a series of basic training sessions to help everyone understand what they could accomplish. These are run monthly in hub offices and available via on-demand webinar.

To tackle our second pillar, we worked on articulating exactly what Data + Analytics can offer. We productised six core offerings under core areas of focus: Audiences, Insights, and Evaluation. Each product is a unique blend of expertise, created with technology partners to make sure teams get the most out of the data we utilise.

Launched at our global leadership summit and on our website, the

six products have provided real context which helps account teams across H+K better understand when to pull in specialists.
Most importantly, we haven't stopped there; data teams across our hubs are continuing to test and learn with new data partners, and new methodologies to make sure we're continuing to push forward and innovate the future of public relations.

Most data programmes fail. That's a good thing – as Facebook's Daniel Stauber said during the 2019 AMEC Summit: "Success is a lousy teacher."

Learning to accept and even celebrate failure feels more challenging in public relations. But in the context of a conversation, failing forward with data literacy is an important lesson; one that must be embraced at the top of an organisation that wants to be truly data-led. It means sharing reports that take a test-and-learn approach, which focus on what's not working and what can be learned.

It means not being afraid to be bold in your investments if you see an opportunity in a data stream, or new technology that might make your work more efficient (or re-write the way you approach a problem entirely). But it takes constant practice, and an ongoing discussion, across all levels of the organisation to get right.

Advice for your data journey

If you're just starting on a similar journey to increase the data literacy of your organisation, the best piece of advice is to remember that change is hard. Here are three behavioural nudges to ease the way.

1. Keep it simple
We default to simplicity. Look for opportunities to make good data the route of least resistance; for example, offer custom metrics before you engage around Advertising Value Equivalents (AVE); package your services rather than presenting them in a menu; or have clear and easy to share materials on measurement available for everyone in the agency.

2. Prove a social norm
We intuitively copy the behaviour of others around us. Peer-to- peer engagement and manager activity is critical to successful change. Consider who your champions will be internally – and not just within the senior leadership team – and arm them with proof.

3. Show momentum
We are much more likely to change our behaviour when we feel as if we're in the middle of a journey, rather than at the start of one. Prove progress by showing immediate benefits.

Share examples of great work you're doing for clients (and the results that prove it out). Hero those who are championing data literacy in your organisation.

Case study 3: Improving data literacy through culture and leadership at CoverageBook

CoverageBook co-founders Gary Preston and Stella Bayles were previously strategy directors at Propellernet where they integrated public relations with search engine optimisation services to grow the agency.

Stella Bayles

Full integration and shared learning improved data literacy which in turn enhanced client insight, strategy, and measurement.

The success multiple award wins and increased agency revenue by 85%.

Before that success the agency was siloed. The department was made up of hires from traditional agencies and the search team were predominantly technical SEO consultants with little creative experience. Although the SEO department was very data literate, drawing insights and storytelling the data was a challenge.
The common attribute between both teams was curiosity and hunger to adapt. That was a key part to every interview in all departments. There was an instilled curious culture and encouragement to always ask why, how, and so what.

An important part of the success was encouraging the SEO and public relations team members to buddy up and work closely with each other every day.

Eventually there was a need for data analysts to work amongst the teams. However, again it was important to integrate and ensure everyone understood each workflow to better understand the data insight needed for each strategy.

Curiosity over calculators

We also looked internally for potential analysts and insight rising stars to train and help into those positions. One consultant Sophie Coley (co-author of Chapter 4) showed such promise, Sophie moved away from communications and became an audience data expert and went on to be a strategy director.

If you're looking to develop your team in this way, it's important to remember that spreadsheet or data studio techniques can be nurtured and learned but inquisitiveness is nature! Curiosity is the greatest asset in a data insight role.

Education is not extra-curricular

We developed an internal academy to ensure the teams understood all disciplines' workflow and skill sets and continue to innovate in their area too. Without sufficient time protected for each consultant to do this, learning would halt. Once Academy time was planned into weekly schedules and had a job number in timesheets learning about new technology and data literacy rocketed

CHAPTER **08**

DATA STORYTELLING AND VISUALISATION

Practical ways to tell stories with data

By Iretomiwa Akintunde-Johnson and Andrew Bruce Smith

What you will learn:

- **The role of practitioners in data storytelling as a means of communication either in management reports or a broader context**
- **The need to present data in a simple and visual way to remove cognitive overload for the reader**
- **Some key principles and best practice ways of presenting data**

Storytelling is supposed to be something that PR practitioners are highly skilled in. Writing remains steadfastly at the top of the list of daily public relations activities.

However, demand for a new kind of narrative ability is on the rise – namely data storytelling and visualisation. This is being driven by the fact that more people are being asked to communicate something to someone using data. Practitioners are increasingly being asked to create data-driven narratives – for content creation purposes as part of campaigns or for reporting and explaining insights about activity to senior management and stakeholders.

The challenge for practitioners is that although they may be skilled in written or verbal storytelling, they aren't naturally good at storytelling with data. No one teaches us how to tell stories with numbers. There is no shortage of tools or data that are supposed to help. But this alone is not enough.

"There is a story in your data. But your tools don't know what that story is. That's where it takes you—the analyst or communicator of the information—to bring that story visually and contextually to life," said Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, author, Storytelling with Data.
Improving data storytelling and visualisation skills

One of the first questions to ask in relation to any kind of data analysis is – what are we doing – exploring or explaining the data? The latter is the focus for data storytelling.

Other key questions to ask are:

- Who is the audience for your data story?
- What is their relationship to you?
- What motivates them?
- What keeps them up at night?

Also, what do you want your audience to do based on your data story?

Change their opinion? Approve a budget to invest more in certain activities? The same questions you would apply to a regular campaign can and should be applied to data visualisation - and what data narrative you use to drive your desired outcomes. This will involve not just what data you decide to use to tell your story – but how that data is displayed and consumed by the target audience. The notion that “the numbers will speak for themselves” is rarely true.

There is no shortage of data sources or tools that in theory should help practitioners to communicate the data narratives they want. However, the ability to add a pie chart to a PowerPoint slide does not turn you into a skilled data-driven communicator. Equally, just giving someone access to dashboard software such as Google Data Studio or Microsoft Power BI does not automatically provide the optimal display of information to convey a purposeful data narrative.

Very often the tools we use condition us to using certain types of charts or visual display without necessarily considering that certain types of visual display are more appropriate for telling a particular kind of data story.

Exploring different means of presenting data

For example, practitioners are extremely likely to be familiar with spreadsheets. However, rather than use them to perform any kind of data analysis, they are often used as databases to hold contact details.

The rows and columns of a spreadsheet often lead to people thinking that presenting data in a tabular format is the right way to show all data. Tables can be an excellent way to display information.

Tables interact with our verbal system, which means that we read them. Consider the two examples below. The table on the left just presents the raw numbers. It takes some effort to isolate where the highest or lowest numbers are and whether high or low is good or bad? The table on the right contains the same information. But the simple use of graded colour makes it far easier to read the table. And to grasp the story being told.

Table

	A	B	C
Category 1	15%	22%	42%
Category 2	40%	36%	20%
Category 3	35%	17%	34%
Category 4	30%	29%	26%
Category 5	55%	30%	58%
Category 6	11%	25%	49%

Heatmap

LOW-**HIGH**

	A	B	C
Category 1	15%	22%	42%
Category 2	40%	36%	20%
Category 3	35%	17%	34%
Category 4	30%	29%	26%
Category 5	55%	30%	58%
Category 6	11%	25%	49%

When you have just a number or two that you want to communicate: use the numbers directly

Estimate article views
4,080,000
316.3%

Social sharing
1,695
41.3%

Scatterplot charts are good for showing correlations between two metrics such as media coverage reach and brand search visibility.

Ironically, pie charts are generally not a good display format for any purpose although practitioners still tend to rely heavily on them (for no good reason).

A key responsibility of a data communicator is to reduce the cognitive load on the recipient of your data narrative.

"Every single element you add to that page or screen takes up cognitive load on the part of your audience — in other words, it takes brain power to process. We should take a discerning look at the visual elements that we allow into our communications. In general, identify anything that isn't adding informative value—or isn't adding enough informative value to make up for its presence—and remove those things," said Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic.

The instinct of a practitioner might be to add elements to a slide or dashboard such as logos or images. However, if that simply distracts or does not add value to the data story, it is more harmful than good.

According to Knaflic, the data storyteller must focus attention where they want it. Making use of pre-attentive attributes such as size, colour, and position on the page are vital elements in the data narrative toolkit.

Here is an example. If you were asked to pick out how many times the number 3 appears in the graphic below, you can do it – but it will take you some time to arrive at the answer. And you may have to go back a few times to check you've got the right solution.

756395068473
658663037576
860372658602
846589107830

The task of counting the number threes in the second version is made considerably easier with the simple use of a bold font.

756**3**9506847**3**
65866**3**0**3**7576
860**3**72658602
8465891078**3**0

The principle of less is more applies to data storytelling and visualisation. The more complicated it looks, the more time an audience perceives it will take to understand and the less likely they are to spend time to understand it.

Here's another example. Just because a tool lets you do something it doesn't mean that you are obliged to use it. Just because you have access to every colour under the sun doesn't mean you should use them all at once. In the left-hand table below, colour has been added to attempt to draw distinctions between the values – but in this case, it merely creates confusion rather than provide clear insight.

The right-hand table contains the same data – but a more restrained use of colour helps to convey far more quickly and clearly exactly where the top performing products are located.

Rainbow distribution in color indicates sales rank in given country from #1 (red) to #10 or higher (dark purple)

Country	A	B	C	D	E
AUS	1	2	3	6	7
BRA	1	3	4	5	6
CAN	2	3	6	12	8
CHI	1	2	8	4	7
FRA	3	2	4	8	10
GER	3	1	6	5	4
IND	4	1	8	10	5
ITA	2	4	10	9	8
MEX	1	5	4	6	3
RUS	4	3	7	9	12
SPA	2	3	4	5	11
TUR	7	2	3	4	8
UK	1	2	3	6	7
US	1	2	4	3	5

RANK	1	2	3	4	5+

COUNTRY I DRUG	A	B	C	D	E
Australia	1	2	3	6	7
Brazil	1	3	4	5	6
Canada	2	3	6	12	8
China	1	2	8	4	7
France	3	2	4	8	10
Germany	3	1	6	5	4
India	4	1	8	10	5
Italy	2	4	10	9	8
Mexico	1	5	4	6	[illegible]
Russia	4	3	7	9	12
Spain	2	3	4	5	11
Turkey	7	2	3	4	8
United Kingdom	1	2	3	6	7
United States	1	2	4	3	5

The table below summarises data visualisation tools and their application.

Tables	These are rows and columns that can help with the comparison of variables. Beyond just storing information on Excel sheets, they can also be a great tool to show differences in simple data sets.
Pie charts and stacked bars	These are sections that depict contributions to a whole and are good for comparing sizes and showing the share of voice or market. But these will also be completely useless in showing patterns, trends, or any other detail.
Line and area charts	These are useful for reflecting changes and trends over a period, and if used well can also be good for predictive analysis. Line graphs, like the word denotes, use lines to demonstrate changes, while area charts show graphically quantitative data.
Scatter plots	These are graphs that show the relationship between two variables in a dataset. It represents data points on a two-dimensional plan. The independent variable or attribute is plotted on the X-axis, while the dependent variable is plotted on the Y-axis.

Table: Common tools for data storytelling

Practitioners need to improve their skills in data storytelling and visualisation – not least because it doesn't come naturally to everyone. More importantly, those that do will be better placed to win support for more investment in public relations activity and will be able to build more successful and value enhancing public relations programmes.

PUBLIC RELATIONS DATA TOOLSTACK

The tools mentioned in this report are listed below along with their function

By Stephen Waddington

Ahrefs	SEO software suite that contains tools for links building, keyword research, competitor analysis, rank tracking and site audits.	https://ahrefs.com/
AnswerThePublic	A keyword tool that visualises search questions and suggested auto complete searches in an image called a search cloud.	https://answerthepublic.com/
Barcelona Principles	A set of seven guidelines established by the public relations industry to measure the effectiveness of public relations campaigns	https://amecorg.com/2020/07/barcelona-principles-3-0/
CoverageBook	A media relations reporting software that helps build reports and share them with stakeholders	https://coveragebook.com/
Global Web Index	An audience research company that provides audience insight to publishers, media agencies and marketers.	https://www.gwi.com/
Google Analytics	A web analytics service provided by Google that tracks and reports website traffic.	https://analytics.google.com/
Google Data Studio	A tool for converting data into customisable dashboards and reports	https://datastudio.google.com/
Google Forms	A market-research tool that gathers data from survey questions.	https://docs.google.com/forms/

Google Trends	A website by Google that analyses the popularity of top search queries in Google Search across various regions and languages.	https://trends.google.com/trends/
Microsoft Power BI	An interactive data visualisation software product developed by Microsoft with a primary focus on business intelligence.	https://powerbi.microsoft.com/
Propel PRM	A customer relationship management platform for public relations	https://www.propelmypr.com/
SEMRush	An online visibility tool for checking links and website traffic.	https://www.semrush.com/
SimilarWeb	Benchmarking tool for website traffic.	https://www.similarweb.com/
SurveyMonkey	A market-research tool that gathers data from survey questions.	https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/
Typeform	Online form and survey building tool.	https://www.typeform.com/

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