
Cutting Through the Communications Data Wilderness

*Research Report from PR News in
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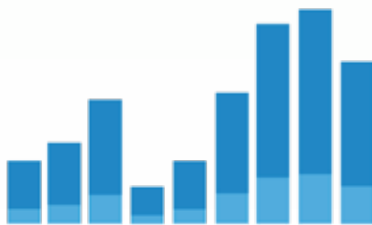
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www.publicrelay.com

Editor, Seth Arenstein,
sarenstein@accessintel.com

Editorial Director, Steve Goldstein,
sgoldstein@accessintel.com

Graphic Designer, Yelena Shamis,
yshamis@accessintel.com

Senior Content Manager, Sophie Maerowitz,
SMAerowitz@accessintel.com

Editor (Guidebooks), Hayley Jennings,
hjennings@accessintel.com

Content Manager, Justin Joffe,
jjoffe@accessintel.com

Director of Marketing, Laura Snitkovskiy,
lsnitkovskiy@accessintel.com

Senior Marketing Manager, Jessica Placencia,
jplacencia@accessintel.com

Sales Director, Katie Sullivan, PR News,
The Social Shake-Up, ksullivan@accessintel.com

VP of Marketing, Amy Jefferies,
ajefferies@accessintel.com

SVP/Group Publisher, Diane Schwartz,
dschwartz@accessintel.com

Chief Operating Officer, Heather Farley

President & CEO, Don Pazour



Published by Access Intelligence, LLC
9211 Corporate Blvd, 4th Floor
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Client Services:

Phone: 888.707.5814 • Fax: 301.309.3847
e-mail: clientservices@accessintel.com

New York Editorial Office:

40 Wall Street, 50th floor, New York, NY 10005
Phone: 212.621.4890 • Fax: 212.621.4879

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Editor's Note

The Road to the C-Suite Is Paved With Communications Data

There may be more complicated and difficult aspects of PR and communications than measurement, but it's hard to name them.

Brand crises are unpleasant to be sure, but it can't compare to the glazed and worried expressions some communications pros affect when terms such as measurement, data, analytics or the Barcelona Principles 2.0 are mentioned. I've seen it. A mild case of dyspepsia ensues in some and retorts such as "I got into PR to get away from numbers" are heard.

This state of worry and concern about measurement was the starting point for this five-part report from PR News and its partner for this project, PublicRelay. One of our intentions was to do some public relations for PR itself, and the best way to do that is to help communicators become clear business analysts and leaders within their own organizations.

Measuring communications can lead to insights that result in improved campaigns and better business results. Instead of guessing at what's working, communicators can measure and know whether or not their messages are effecting change. Such precision is invaluable as communicators move to become business strategists.

It is our hope this report will induce the last few non-measuring communicators to realize, as Socrates might have told them, "The unmeasured PR campaign is not worth funding."

—Seth Arenstein, editor, PR News

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Moving From Data to Insights

By Seth Arenstein

[Editor's Note: In this first article of a five-part PR News series produced with partner PublicRelay, a media monitoring and analytics firm, we examine the common challenges of measuring communications data so it can be turned into useful insights that will help not only communicators but the business overall. We start with a question: "What's in it for me to think about insights?" Included is a look at how to move communicators from using data simply to prove the return on investment (ROI) of PR, known as reporting, to a strategic approach, where data is mined for business insights. We end this first part with a look at examples where brands in insurance, pharmaceuticals and financial services used communications data to provide business insights.]

On a micro level, some communicators shy away from data and measurement fearing, incorrectly, that their lack of mathematical competency will be exposed. How many times have you heard a PR professional tell you he or she pursued a PR career precisely to avoid using numbers? It is unfortunate that this erroneous assumption continues to hold sway in some quarters. One of the goals of this series of articles is to debunk that assumption.

Another fear of communicators who resist data: If they measure, data might show that certain of their PR efforts are failing. Worse, measuring data purely as a way to gauge ROI could indicate that PR is contributing too little to a company's business goals. While both of those scenarios are possible outcomes, without seeking the insights data provides, such failings could continue interminably.

The good news is that many communicators are measuring and accessing data. Some, though, seem to be measuring from a position of fear. They're almost solely in reporting mode, measuring data for ROI alone. As such

they're missing the potential of data to be applied strategically. They're also eschewing data's power to provide insights into how communicators and businesses can improve. In many cases, not only can communications data provide insights to raise brand awareness, it also can help drive leads and sales.

In this first of five articles, we speak with six communicators who advocate using communications data for deriving insights as opposed to merely proving ROI.

These executives also offer examples of why this mindset is critical in today's business environment. In addition, they discuss how PR teams still using data mainly to prove ROI can shift their thinking so they are mining insights from analytics that can not only change the way communicators are operating but also contribute to a business' revenue.

It's not an accident that none of the brand communicators interviewed for this article described himself or herself as a "data person." In fact, most of them felt that communications professionals could be taught what they need to know to make judicious use of data.

Data Insights: 'What's In It For Me?'

The old marketing adage is that everyone's favorite radio station is WIIFM, or What's In It For Me? Similarly with data and measurement, the first question that skeptical communicators need answered is, "What's in it for me to think about data insights?"

For many of those we spoke with, a major issue was using data to anticipate what might be ahead. If you're using data only to "get a sense of how you're doing today, you're being reactive and somewhat backward," says Michael Schneider, VP, public relations, at ADP, the payroll services company. Communicators, he says, need to be cognizant of data "to look forward...at what's over the hill."

There's a more current element to seeking insights from data, adds Emil Janssens, who heads communications and marketing in North America for insurer Allianz Global. "Data-driven insights allow more informed decision making, which can help fine-tune your strategy, optimize your marketing and communications and generate more business."



Adam Snyder, VP,
Communications,
Mitsubishi UFJ
Financial Group

Measure, Don't Guess

Gone are the days when so much of communications involved guesswork, says Adam Snyder, VP, communications, at Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group. "Now we have facts in the form of data...so if you're not drawing conclusions and getting insights from data, then all you're doing is guessing."

Adds David Chamberlin, SVP & chief communications officer at PNC Financial Services Group, "I don't have to stick my finger up into the wind...I have hard data" that shows, for example, the reporters and publications "most and least favorable to my brand...how well our messaging is being received and shared" and similar metrics for PNC's competition.



David Chamberlin,
SVP, CCO,
PNC Financial
Services Group

For example, Chamberlin relates a situation recently where data changed his team's behavior. Several stories about the brand that ran in a traditional media platform were driving significant social traffic for PNC. The brand initially thought these were "small, local stories" and they were largely ignored during planning meetings, he says. When figures in social measurement reports spiked, the team investigated, found the source and reacted accordingly, he says. "We know now that a certain type of content that we can provide resonates with audiences," he says, "but we have to make sure it gets covered" by pitching it to media.

The example above shows also that tracking data, of course, also offers communicators insight about audiences. What do they care about? What are they thinking? What are they responding to? What's their mood?



Molly James-Lundak,
Senior Director,
Corporate Digital
Marketing,
AbbVie

Molly James-Lundak, senior director, corporate digital marketing at pharmaceutical firm AbbVie, turns our original question on its head. "What's the risk if I'm not looking for data insights? The risk is eventually someone's going to ask you, 'How do we know what's working and what's not?'" The wealth of data from social media analytics and traditional media "holds a lot" of the answers, she argues.

What Works, What Doesn't



Michael Schneider,
VP, PR,
ADP

For example, AbbVie analyzed 6 months of data and found audiences were not highly engaged with the social media content it was publishing from medical conventions. The thing is, AbbVie was producing more of this content than any other. It wasn't necessarily AbbVie's content, though, since audiences were engaged with other offerings the brand produced. This prompted AbbVie to ask why its medical meeting content was failing to hit the mark.

The team's hypothesis was that conference attendees often are very busy at medical meetings, learning new things and sharing their insights, so there's a battle for attention for social content. This led AbbVie to turn down the social noise during medical conventions dramatically. It published far less content during medical conventions and instead focused on delivering high-value content before events, when followers likely have more time. In addition, it amplified only select voices during conferences. The result was greater engagement overall with fewer pieces of content, and less money spent on content development.

With communications budgets seemingly tightening continually, data insights, such as the AbbVie example above, become critical. For Marie Kennedy, VP, communications and PR, at Dignity Health in San Francisco, analytical insights from data are key to making sure “you’re spending resources the right way.”

Adds AbbVie’s James-Lundak, the surety of data destroys the old joke about the executive who knows half her budget is being wasted; she just doesn’t know which half.

The Challenges



Emil Janssens,
Head of
Communications
& Marketing,
Allianz Global

As we know, effecting change is rarely easy. Changing tradition can be even more onerous. “Traditionally, communications people haven’t been asked to bring the rigor of business reporting to their jobs,” PNC’s Chamberlin says. “Many people in the communications world focus on becoming communications experts.” The issue, though, is communications becomes relegated to a soft discipline relied on for media quotes, blog posts and tweets.

Chamberlin, who will be profiled in the second article in this series, says, “The challenge to

my team has been, ‘We have to be business people first, communications experts who are socially engaged, second. That’s pretty big leap. And I think it’s something the entire industry has struggled with.’”



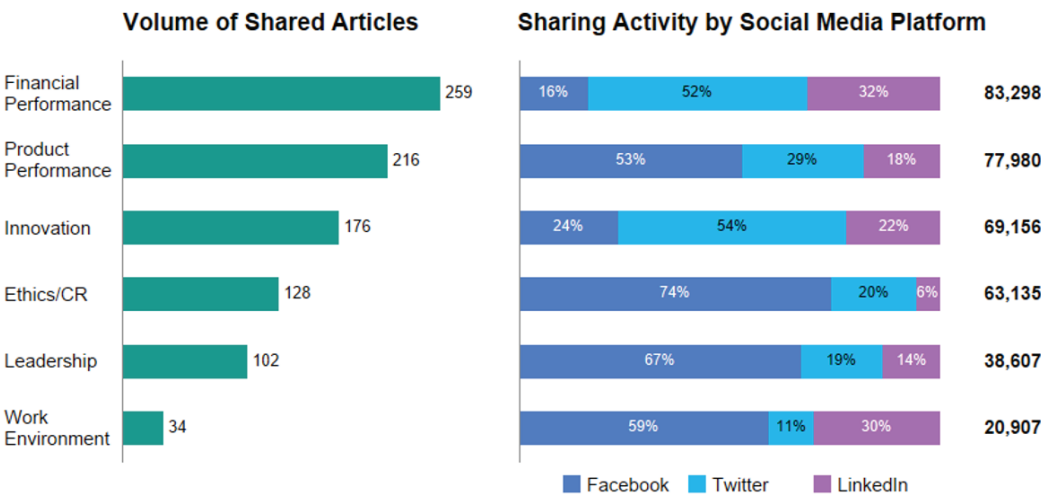
Marie Kennedy, VP,
Communications
& PR,
Dignity Health

Getting PR pros to seek insights from data can be more complicated than changing mindsets, though. Once the decision has been made to measure, communicators need to decide what to measure. “You must get consensus across the organization” about what metrics matter most “to your plan and your brand,” Schneider of ADP says.

A tip: It’s critical to put a lot of effort into the question of what to measure upfront. “When you can get agreement...that makes people value the data and the results so much more than if you hadn’t gotten that buy-in.”

Adding complexity to this situation is the “the sheer number of data sources” available, such as social media analytics and traditional data, says James-Lundak. Integrating the plethora of data meaningfully can be challenging, “because they’re coming from different places and are structured differently.”

Social Amplification of Traditional Media Coverage by Reputational Driver



Driving School: An example of data being mined for insights. This chart shows topics covered in traditional media and where they are shared socially. Brands can use patterns from this data to build strategies, depending on their goals. Twitter dominates Financial Performance and Innovation; head to Facebook for Ethics and Leadership. Source: PublicRelay

Tenacity and Measurement

Beyond knowing what to measure, it takes a certain amount of courage to stick with the metrics you decide to use, James-Lundak argues. “You can’t just abandon your measurement efforts after a few weeks because you haven’t discovered any insights,” she says.

“Sometimes there is no insight, but more a confirmation of what

you're doing is on track. I'd be shocked if in 6 to 12 months you don't learn something new that shifts the way you're developing your communications or new channels you're thinking about."

Measuring With One Voice

There are other consistency issues to consider, too. For example, should you be at a multinational company, it's important to "make sure you have one global standard for measurement across the board," Schneider says. You want to be able to talk about how PR is functioning and have it mean the same thing across the board. This is possible only if all PR units of a company are emphasizing the same KPIs.

For example, when a global company's PR unit is discussing volume on a social channel, is the emphasis on impressions? Tone of voice or sentiment? Share of voice? Engagement?

What a global company wants to avoid, Schneider says, is for one region to be emphasizing a particular metric, while other regions are stressing different metrics. That unwanted situation will provide "a variety of narratives across your organization on how well PR is functioning." But using the same KPIs over time "you'll really be able to pull together some good insights that will help guide and shape your strategy."

There's yet another issue with consistency. "I strongly believe you have to have a regular cadence for reviewing and sharing data" with your team and others, AbbVie's James-Lundak says. "If you don't get into this habit of making [measuring and sharing] part of your daily work, I think it's very easy for it to fall by the wayside."

Chamberlin believes communicators need to stop looking at data only on a quarterly basis. "You need to be immersed in data every day because you want to be able to see where the opportunities are...and, believe it or not, you find nuggets on a daily basis to potentially

launch a micro campaign [in response to a data-inspired insight] or to raise or kill an issue."

C-Suite Issues

Sometimes there are challenges in the C-suite, too, Snyder of Mitsubishi Financial suggests. "Until probably about five or six years ago, you had senior people not believing in [social media] data because they came up at a time when you didn't have the wealth of data available that we have today...data wasn't the most important thing in making a decision."

James-Lundak points out another challenge associated with measuring data and seeking insights: With technology, sometimes things go wrong, which influences the quality of data. She points to bots, seasonal irregularities or other noise that can disrupt the regular flow of quality data. Of course, sometimes irregular-looking data can be what's happened.

There are more prosaic challenges to measuring and using data strategically. "I have seen technology infrastructure, budget and lack of resources be hurdles to take on a data-driven approach in organizations," Janssens of Allianz says. But he adds, "it is important to understand that quick wins can often be realized without spending lots of time and resources."

Fortitude Required

Finally, there's a question of fortitude. Says AbbVie's James-Lundak, "It takes some degree of courage" to offer data insights "because they may show some of the things we've been working on are not effective."

Chamberlin of PNC agrees. "Measurement and data can be a little scary, because you can hold people accountable. Communicators in many cases have been able to slide for a long time because they haven't been able to show with measurement how well they're messaging, for example. And they haven't had to deal with figuring out opportunities."

How to Move Communicators

An important part of the journey to more meaningful measurement is getting communicators who downplay data and measuring to embrace the idea of gaining insights from data. For Snyder of Mitsubishi, you need to understand peoples' concerns, which, he says, "are mostly rooted in a fear or a lack of understanding of digital and social." The best way to overcome that, he believes, is to bring data "down to a level of tangibility that they will understand."

Snyder sets up a scenario where you explain about people sharing a favorite sports article on their Facebook page. "Then their friends see it and click on it, and they share it. You tell them the same thing happens with a business article shared on LinkedIn." The mistake people make, Snyder says, is that they speak about data "in big, ethereal terms...they mention 'communities of people and conversations to engage in.' These are things people haven't seen, but they have seen articles shared on Facebook."

Snyder's conclusion is that "people complicate [social data] to a degree it doesn't need to be," he argues. "So much of what happens with data is complicated. That's why there are brilliant people...who can pull the data, work the data, source the data, chop it, etc., etc. That's complicated." What communicators do with data once it's been distilled is far less complicated.

A tip from James-Lundak for those wary of providing data insights: Use the concept of testing. "Once you put 'test' in front of something, people usually will go along with it," she says. "Let's test this tactic. Let's test this hypothesis."

She suggests starting by saying, "Let's take this campaign or effort and let's test it and see if we are making a difference in the behavior of the people we want to reach." She adds, "You do it in sort of a safe way when you confine it to a testing environment." From there, she says, you build momentum by measuring another effort and eventually "you shift the way you talk about measuring the work that you do."

Data Scientists vs. Data Users

Finally, it's important to know the difference between data scientists, who can "slice, dice and really work with data," says Snyder, and communicators, who use data to gain insights. "I can't build a data model, but I can use it once it's built," Snyder says.

Adds James-Lundak, "I'm not a data person." Indeed, none of those we interviewed considered themselves measurement experts. Curiosity about data is critical, she says, as well as objectivity. Adds Kennedy, with the tools available to communicators today, you don't need a statistics degree to make use of data for insights. "It's an exciting time for communicators because we can measure what we're doing and as a result be more effective," she says. ■

When Big Data Equals Big Answers

By Seth Arenstein

[Editor's Note: In this second article, we compile cases where communicators have moved beyond the fundamentals of measuring data to prove ROI and instead focused on using insights mined from data to change the way they operated their business.]

CASE 1



Rich Silverman
Director,
Communications,
MUFG

The first case centers on MUFG, the largest bank in Japan and the world's fifth largest. Yet it's a brand that "needs quite a bit more enhancement, particularly in the U.S., to more effectively compete with global banking rivals," says Rich Silverman, director, corporate

communications. As such, the communications team's goals have been to educate and inform audiences about MUFG and what it does.

MUFG uses a group of digital tools to inform its outbound strategy (proactive, reactive and opportunistic) and measure its success. "It's not only about getting out a message, rather we must know if we're reaching the right people, changing perception and seeing our brand mentioned in relevant online conversations," Silverman says.

The Hurdle

In past years, MUFG had large delegations attend a major trade show. Team members were on panels, arranged to meet clients and hosted invitation-only events.

Insight from Data

Having its executives at the show proved useful, but working with data showed their presence wasn't "influencing our broader brand awareness at a time when important audiences were watching," Silverman says.

"Analyzing the data we realized we were missing several key ingredients: First, our

competitors extended their onsite presence by scheduling interviews with important media at the show." In addition, while many MUFG executives were visible participants in the online conversation during the show, leaders of the social dialogue didn't see mentions originating from their digital properties. Instead they were mentioned in posts, photos, and graphics that important journalists, analysts and other conference attendees crafted.

MUFG knew of the importance of being seen online, and of being part of the dialogue. "So we went into the show with the idea that it wasn't enough to just schedule media meetings, rather we decided to examine the data to see which reporters were leading the online conversation on a conference's hashtag." This way, MUFG was able to ensure it was not only mentioned in stories, but also was seen as an important part of the show. "The results of this change yielded major dividends for our brand," Silverman says.

After the show, "We looked at individual-level data to gauge our success. Beyond a major uptick in brand mentions and other critical metrics, we also were able to share information with our stakeholders that can drive their business." For example, MUFG let its internal clients know whether a prospect or client had seen an article in which they were mentioned.

Lessons Learned

Silverman considers this case "a true learning experience for us. It changed how we go to market with our communications and proved the connection between earned media and online conversation, reinforced the importance of a data-driven communications strategy and showed our work can directly influence our company's business."

CASE 2

The next case also involves a trade show, CES, the gargantuan annual event for the global technology community. The show hosts more than 6,000 journalists who produce some 60,000 stories with potential impressions reaching in excess of 69 billion on show days alone.

The Issues

The scope of coverage presented challenges for the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), the show's organizer, including how to discern the tone of media coverage and address negative stories; and how to monitor coverage and respond in real time, says Jeff Joseph, SVP, communications & strategic relationships, CTA.

Insight From Data



Jeff Joseph
SVP,
Communications
and Strategic
Relationships, CTA

Partnering with PublicRelay, tonality was assigned to each story, using human review instead of a bot or other technology-based solutions. "We believed the human review would do a better job of recognizing important nuances that a bot might miss," Joseph says.

After each story had a tonality, CTA was able to compare overall tonality with competitive events. "We used this information to provide a data-based analysis of key media to demonstrate the overall value of our show to exhibitors and to drive corporate goals related to reducing negative coverage."

A dashboard allowed CTA to monitor print and digital coverage in real time. At the show, communications teams could see the dashboard on a large screen inside their offices. A PublicRelay staffer provided daily briefings at the show.

Lessons

Tracking data, CTA was able to "identify coverage trends and adapt our messaging



Jerry Nichols
Global Head,
Marketing
Performance
Management, SAP

as necessary." For example, CTA could see specific product segments were receiving more coverage than others. That trend prompted CTA "to move to provide more accessible information" about those products to media to help amplify the coverage. CTA also used data to provide reports to key exhibitors driving

those trends and "adjusted messaging and promotion around other trends we wanted to push," he says.

At show close, CTA shared data with key exhibitors and keynoters to help them track show value from a media engagement perspective.

These positive experiences led CTA to augment its use of data. For example, "We use tools to help us measure our coverage on policy issues," Joseph says. It tracks message engagement and compares tone and quality of coverage vs other associations. "We now include the data charts in our reports to internal senior staff and our board."

CASE 3

The next case comes from SAP, the multinational that produces enterprise software to manage business operations and customer relations.

The Issue

By 2020, SAP aspires to be a top 10 brand. To meet that goal, "It was imperative that we executed our 2016 strategy and meet our targets for Key Performance Indicators (KPI)," says Jerry Nichols, global head of marketing performance management.

A key component of the 2016 strategy was Run Simple, a global, omni-channel advertising campaign. The challenge was to provide "a readout of the market impact of Run Simple."

To quantify Run Simple and optimize customer experience across paid, owned

and earned media, Nichols and his team implemented a measurement approach aligned to the Barcelona 2.0 principles and the customer journey.



David Chamberlin,
SVP, CCO,
PNC Financial
Services Group

Run Simple’s goal was to generate market awareness and demand for SAP’s technologies. A critical component was defining the customer journey in alignment with SAP’s paid, owned and earned media channel strategies and the campaign’s goals. Performance measures, associated sources and comparison types were identified across paid, owned and earned media channels. These included: digital metrics, social media monitoring, brand health, media coverage and demand generation performance.

Data Insights

It’s a shame communicators shy away from data due to what they perceive as its complex nature. This case shows how wrong that attitude can be. One of the lessons of this case, Nichols says, is that “a collection of minor improvements [found via data] can culminate in” big results.

“We looked for outliers,” he says, measurements that were overly good or bad. For example, early in Run Simple, data showed a landing page had a poor click-through rate. That outlier, Nichols says, prompted analysis. The fix was simple: Graphics were changed slightly to better alert users to click through; results were significant.

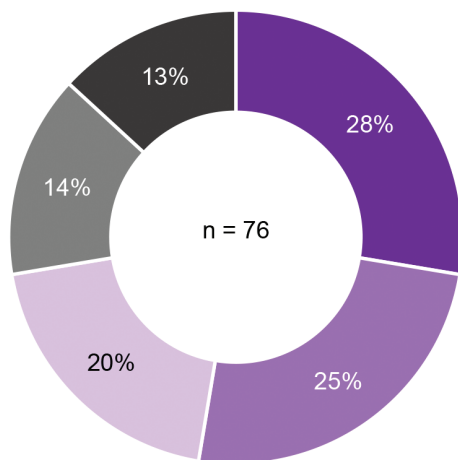
CASE 4

The final case, like the first, involves a bank. The bank, whose name we agreed to omit, is a major financial institution; however, this case came from a time when it was seen as a contributor to the country’s financial crisis. Some were arguing that the bank should be shuttered.

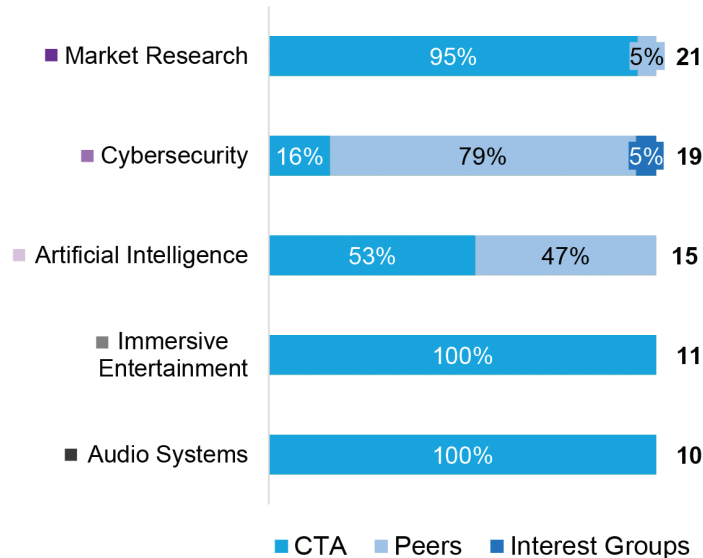
The Hurdle

The bank knew it was helping in various ways to overcome the country’s financial crisis, not to deepen it. Its communicators used data to strategically tell positive stories, says David Chamberlin, SVP, CCO, PNC Financial Services Group, who worked for the bank in this case study. “We needed to understand in a very granular way what was happening, literally on a daily basis, to our reputation,” he says. “We needed to understand the opportunities we knew about (when positive stories were written) and those we hadn’t seen.”

Top Industry Topics



Organization Share of Voice



Voice Recognition Software: The success CTA had with data at CES led it to measure policy issues. Above is a graphic example of share of voice. Source: CTA

Use of Data

The bank's communicators used a measurement tool to pull in countless stories daily, on nearly a real-time basis. Micro campaigns were designed based on what this robust measurement effort yielded.

A key insight the bank gleaned from data: "There was a huge difference between talking to national and local media," he says. "When we talked to local media our message was picked up 90% of the time. With national media, it was next to zero."

The bank realized "local media was a much better plan for us and the brand. We would never have known this without the research and the data," Chamberlin says.

"It wasn't just a finger in the wind as to which paper or reporter we felt was most positive toward us." When reporters were positive, he says, "The question became how do you work with him/her so that they have even more materials when they talk about you?" The bank decided not to spend much time courting negative reporters, he says. Instead it concentrated on positive reporters and those in the middle, who had positive and negative attitudes toward the bank.

The bank also measured its spokespeople. The data showed a key executive was one of its most negative spokespeople. The reason: The executive was repeating negative questions in his responses, so he was showing up as negative. ■

12 PR Leaders Assess the Data Era

By Seth Arenstein

[Editor's Note: For this third article we share insights from a PR News/PublicRelay Communications Leadership Roundtable held in November 2017, a convocation of 12 senior communications professionals. The following is a summary of the questions posed and comments during the discussion (the participants, who are listed on the next page, were told in advance that they would not be quoted for attribution).]

Is Data Transforming Communications?

"Data has given us the keys to the C-suite. It's the best time ever to be in PR," a participant said. Another agreed, "Data makes us more relevant to those we're communicating to."

On the other hand, some warned not to get too enamored of data alone. Proper analysis of data is critical, the group agreed. "We need to make sure we don't get seduced by the surface value of data," one executive urged the group.

Another executive argued that making good use of data takes time, training and experience. "You have to augment technology and data with humans." A participant added, "Everyone who offers a technology solution [for data work], they're all pretty much the same thing," one executive said. "What makes a difference is the human element. The data's only as smart as the questions we ask about it."

"We talk about data from a measurement standpoint, but rarely mention analytics, insight and optimization...these areas provide a better foundation for a strategic conversation with the C-suite."

A participant mentioned the need "to spend a lot of time cleaning data...data scientists spend 80% of their time doing this." The participant continued, "Data is like oil, it needs to be refined."

The group agreed there's another downside to measurement as there are "questionable methodologies" being used to analyze data.

Said one participant, "It's easy to be seduced by amazing charts from platform providers. When I challenge providers they say, 'Only you would ask that.' It's currently a gold mine for platforms, and people are going to use data to sell."

Black box solutions also came under criticism. "You can catch the human that created the questionable methodology, but with black boxes, the humans don't really know what's in there," said one participant. The group agreed it's imperative for the industry to learn more about what's behind data methodologies.

There's an adage that PR needs to have a seat at the table when important business issues are being discussed. What are your thoughts on why this is still being said and how can we burnish PR's image so it has a full voice? In the current political climate, one executive argued, having a corporate purpose is critical and it's no longer acceptable for brands to remain silent on political and social issues. "Because of that, the CCO [chief communications officer] must have a seat at the table."

Added another, "The audience [for PR] has evolved over time." [With social media,] there's a public aspect to all a company's activities. Companies need to bring communicators to the table because it's not only the press that's influencing their business, but regulators and consumers.

Another reason PR has a better chance to be at the table is PR has evolved from being laser focused on earned media. "Now we're also content creators. And with social media, our employers and consumers are all broadcasters."

That's helped raise the importance of PR," this executive said.

Crisis PR also has helped, the group agreed, as has PR's ability to keep stories out of the papers. "We all have metrics," one executive said, "but it's those articles that we make sure we don't appear in that are so valuable. We've started showcasing that with our senior leaders."

It's also that PR knows how to help CEOs avoid saying things that could become inflammatory. "We know where the minefields are," an executive said. "The measurement of the crisis avoided is the holy grail," another said.

Data for the Defense

For communicators who have been seated at the C-suite table "it's been a disappointment...for years we've struggled to defend ourselves" due to a lack of data, one executive argued. PR pros were unsure where they were making an impact. "The opportunity with big data is insight," this executive said. "Earned media in this noisy environment is the gold standard. We now can say to the C-suite, 'From this data insight, let me tell you three things that will help your P&L.'"

The group agreed there also needs to be a long-range strategy for measurement. "We have to get away from the short-term, episodic, what-happened-this-week approach. It's risky to focus on an individual moment."

'The Reaction of the Moment'

The accelerated pace of management, measurement and news cycles was a constant refrain during the session. "Everything seems to be short term, but creating a brand takes

THE PARTICIPANTS



Andrew Bowins,
SVP, Communications
and Industry Affairs,
Entertainment Software Association



Ally Bunin,
VP, Employee
Engagement,
Brighton Health Plans



Steve Cody,
CEO, Peppercomm



Jessica Driscoll, VP,
Communications,
Discovery
Communications



Dave Guarino,
VP, Communications,
S&P Global



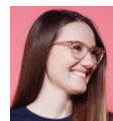
**Catherine
Hernandez-Blades,**
Chief Brand and
Communications Officer,
Aflac



Allyson Hugley,
President,
Measurement and Analytics,
Weber Shandwick



Rosemary Mercedes,
CCO, SVP, Corporate
Communications, Univision



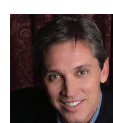
Nadia Petschek Rawls,
Director, Social Media
and Audience Development,
TED Conferences



Michael Schneider,
VP, Communications,
ADP



Andy Whitehouse,
Founder,
Copperfield



Eric Koefoot,
President/CEO,
PublicRelay

time. Companies and communicators make a mistake when they lack a long-term, sustained measurement effort" an executive said.

The consensus of the group was that with the excessive focus on politics, it's taking longer and longer to get stories picked up in the press. "A CCO's most important quality is stamina," one participant said.

Another issue with the rapid pace of business is that new products and people seem to receive the most recognition. This is an issue, particularly when it comes to finding data insights, said one executive, since "experience" is critical to frame data. Without experience and "diverse wisdom," another executive said, "you don't know what's a passing fad or not."

There were positives, however, during this part of the discussion in that some mentioned a more reasoned approach to measurement

and managing. An executive noted, “We have switched to a disciplined, month-over-month, quarter-over-quarter approach to measurement.” The company, the executive said, is tracking themes that are “part of our overall business strategy...we’re operating now at a higher level.”

Another executive picked up on themes. “We’re looking at how our metrics move against a theme. That level of disciplined metrics over time changes things. We measure share of voice against a fixed list of outlets. If you measure everything you can’t get a good picture of share of voice. Do I look at a target list across all channels? No. We look at Twitter, print and digital separately.”

Many in the group echoed the idea that sometimes brands measure and value metrics that customers find irrelevant. “We now look at themes that actually are breaking through,” said one. “We have data to demonstrate to the C-suite how people are consuming content and what they’re consuming.”

What Are CEOs’ Views of Social Media?

“Some CEOs think social media is just posting,” said one participant. “In fact, social media is much more about engagement. It’s reaching out to a particular audience and bringing it back to a potential opportunity.”

Said an executive, “Measuring social now is like the challenge we had with media relations 10 years ago. No matter how polished a video is, was it impactful? We’re all in love with video, but maybe an image with a cutline is going to do a better job driving people to a website. We had a video that gained lots of eyeballs, but the main message

was in the last minute and 80% of viewers had turned it off by then.”

Argued another executive, “It comes down to the content, the audience and what the objective is.”

Said another, some metrics provide almost no deep insights on engagement. For example, 75% of articles shared aren’t read, this executive said.

Where Does Social Sit in Your World?

The consensus on social media was that no department owns it and that it should be seen as a tool. “Did people used to say, ‘Who owns the phone?’ Nobody owns social anymore, like there’s a ringed fence around it,” one executive said. Added another, “Social wedges itself between comms and marketing at our company. It should be treated as a channel.”

Wherever social sits, another participant said, “there needs to be close collaboration between digital and communications. I involve the digital person in every meeting.” Added another executive, “We don’t look at social from a channel perspective. There’s a tremendous amount of internal training needed. There are so many different things—social selling, it’s all over the place.”

What Are the Characteristics of the Communicator of the Future?

“He or she will have to be a jack of all trades...like journalists who write articles, do social media and appear on camera.” On the subject of future communicators, another executive said, “I think we’re all looking for people who are talented but have judgment and understand business. We all struggle with hiring.” ■

Reputation Measurement Challenges

By Seth Arenstein

[Editor's Note: In this fourth article we examine some of the challenges of reputation management.]

What a time to be talking about reputation. First there was a global hubbub over how President Trump reacted to a New Year's Day statement from N. Korean leader Kim Jong Un about his country's nuclear weapons being able to reach the U.S. Then, a few days later, a book claiming to be based on countless hours of observation and interviews paints an unflattering portrait of the president and his team.

We'll switch the focus from political reputation and image to measuring brand and corporate reputation, which often is thought to be more problematic than garden-variety measurement of communications efforts. Part of the reason is because it's nuanced and requires more human intelligence. As one PR exec says, "Measuring reputation is very context-heavy...it's not just a few keywords...you have to be looking at a variety of factors that make up reputation and looking at them constantly."

Catherine Hernandez-Blades, chief brand and communications officer, Aflac, provides an example. "We are launching My Special Aflac Duck this week at CES...a social robot, it is designed to support children undergoing cancer treatment...Aflac is committed to putting them into the hands of all of the approximately 16,000 children diagnosed with cancer in the U.S. annually, at no cost to the child or family," she says.

"Yet, we know people are reluctant to believe a corporation would do something so wonderful without an angle, which is deeply unfortunate as it's a philanthropic rather than a commercial venture...My point being, even when you do good for the sake of doing good, you're still going to have cynics. In

terms of measurement, you have to find a way to capture the impact of the behavior of cynics and that can be very difficult."

Reputation as the New Measurement

For Andrew Bowins, SVP, communications and industry affairs, Entertainment Software Association, "Reputation is the new measure of communications." He believes communicators need to "abandon the old model of communications measurement and recognize that insights, understanding of stakeholders and their perception of a brand/company are the most important measures."



Andrew Bowins
SVP,
Communications
and Industry
Affairs,
Entertainment
Software
Association

Bowins goes a step further. He says this new measure of communications means communicators must accept that "traditional measures like impressions, reach and media clips largely are meaningless without insights attached. It also means that the profession has to abandon separate measures for [social] channels and instead look at

the aggregate of conversations across social media, traditional media, online and word of mouth. This is a real challenge for any professional hanging onto the traditional measurement model of communications."

Timing Is Critical



Catherine Hernandez-Blades
Chief Brand and
Communications
Officer, Aflac

Bowins and Hernandez-Blades agree reputation management needs to be a regular part of communications measurement.

"The biggest hurdle is when to measure reputation," Bowins says. "Too often a company's reaction to issues is the starting point for reputation

measurement and management. If you begin [measuring reputation] during a crisis, then it's too late. Reputation has to be managed in real time, over time and benchmarked against defined themes and goals."

Adds Hernandez-Blades, "All good measurement requires a strong baseline, as well as relevant and accurate data that is meaningful and benchmarking."

Bowins notes, "You need to have a set of defined reputation goals, stories and themes that you drive in good times and bad. This multi-layered model of measurement is critical to reputation management and one that does not come easily if you are still counting clips, measuring reach and looking at impressions alone."

What Gets Measured?

A cliché is that the conversations people are having about a company define its brand and reputation. What should be measured to determine reputation?

Hernandez-Blades suggests measuring corporate governance as a start. Aflac conducts an annual survey of private and institutional investors. Three years ago, the first year of the study, 6 in 10 investors would not invest in a company without a stellar CSR reputation. The elements of which are most commonly workplace procedures, corporate governance and citizenship. In 2017, that number rose to 8 in 10.

Bowins adds, "It is critical to listen twice as hard as you speak. Understanding the sentiment and themes [good or bad] that people say about your brand is the first step toward measuring reputation. Once you have the ability to listen and collect the data that shows trends in perceptions, you can set a baseline or benchmark for your reputation goals. Match those insights with the measurement of clearly defined stories, themes and attributes and you will begin to see the whole picture."

Budget Concerns

Turning to cost, Bowins believes large budgets are not needed to measure reputation and unlock insights. One needs simple tools that capture and organize data from online, social and traditional media. The key is finding a vendor, partner or in-house expertise that can analyze the metrics and derive insights from the data. "This is a required skillset of the modern communicator," he says.

Start small and grow, Bowins counsels. "Start with defined audiences and a handful of reputation attributes like trust, integrity, citizenship or product quality. As a starting point, align your themes and measure them against a finite group of journalist, influencers, analyst or bloggers. Once you lock that group down, add another group and grow...refine your listening engine."

Always ask your senior leaders, "What is the cost of not managing our reputation and not knowing what people say and think about the brand until it is too late?"

A significant problem, Bowins believes, is some PR pros have been slow to evolve and adapt. "Once you unlock the insights, you have the keys to manage your reputation and the ability to listen to signals in real time and over a period of time. You also have the ability to benchmark reputation to points in time, competitors or with key stakeholder groups."

Adds Hernandez-Blades, "At Aflac we use this data to inform our communications strategy. And, because we measure outcomes—think results vs. activity—we can see the needle move in almost real time."

Both believe another challenge is avoiding getting lost in the data and actually unlocking meaningful insights that will shape communications recommendations. "You have to always remind yourself," Bowins says, "the data is only as smart as the questions you ask. You must know what questions to ask." ■

Next-Gen Communicators Preach Data With a Human Heart

By Seth Arenstein

[Editor's Note: In the last article of this five-part series, we profile a trio of rising communicators who embody many of the ideas about measurement and data analytics examined in earlier articles.]

True, there's more data available to communicators than ever and it's likely data will grow, not decline, in the years ahead. Fear not, though, this article won't be about math nerds or numbers jockeys.

Indeed, it seems entirely fitting that the three rising communications stars who were profiled for this article embraced the idea of measuring communications data after they began their careers as PR pros and marketers.

When we interview David Chamberlin, SVP, CCO, PNC Financial Services Group, who is featured prominently in this series, and ask him to provide insight for an introduction to this article, the first thing he mentions is the need for next-generation communicators to come out of school writing well and thinking clearly. "It drives bosses crazy when people can't write. And believe it or not, some people in communications can't write well."

Chamberlin adds, "Having a well-rounded background...[and] intellectual curiosity... as well as an ability to understand and dig through various issues" is critical. In addition, knowledge of history is important, since "history repeats itself." He next mentions, "It's incredibly helpful to have the ability to read a balance sheet."

Since Chamberlin's a staunch advocate of measurement, we ask where an ability to work with data figures on his list of needs for young communicators. "The young people I'm seeing don't have a good grasp on data and analytics...so it's going to be hit or miss [if they eventually gain a good understanding of

communications data]." It depends, he says, on where they end up working. "If they focus on social media, then yes, they'll have to learn analytics," he says.

With social media's rise in the past 10 years, "you hope they'd come out of communications school having a feel for the importance of analytics and...the ability to predict what's going to happen based on data and big data."

Knowing how to work with data early "will make a huge difference" in a communicator's career progress, he feels. "If they seek to be a CCO or a CMO or just a part of a marketing organization, it'll be really important for them...because so much of the job in certain places is becoming, 'Hey, what do we do with the data? How do we do it?'"

A more immediate challenge, Chamberlin says, is being able to "translate what's happening in social media and bringing it over to communications and corporate communications and applying it there."

The Poet



Ethan McCarty
CEO, Integral
Communications
Group

None of the educational backgrounds of our young communicators include analytics. Ethan McCarty, former global head, employee & innovation communication at Bloomberg and current CEO of Integral Communications Group, for example, has an undergraduate degree from Ohio University in creative writing. His graduate degree from the New School for Social Research in liberal studies had him "taking classes with Christopher Hitchens and reading Marx." Ironically, McCarty recently began teaching media and analytics at Columbia University at the graduate level. "I love it," he says.

Having never studied communications, McCarty's education in analytics was obtained during a 13-year stint at IBM. He joined the company as a writer and editor after having been a journalist prior to that. McCarty credits his appreciation for communications data to working under "great managers" at IBM like Jon Iwata and Ben Edwards.

"The DNA of [IBM] is very oriented toward a data view of the world," he says. IBM, he adds, sees the world as being composed of data.

"As communicators we can seek observable phenomenon and see if we can design communications programs that work back from the desired observable things in the world, whether they are behaviors or progressions of thinking...this became part of my world view" and would lead him to data-heavy Bloomberg.

A Convert to Data

Despite his background in poetry, "I forced myself to become comfortable and fluent in data." The transition was critical. "The idea of analytics in the communications practice is so important because what we do is help shape beliefs that drive action...we can measure whether our efforts are improving outcomes, having no effect or making things worse."

Owing to the profusion of digital data, communicators can see more steps than ever along the route to that desired behavior. "These little changes we observe give us the ability to do two things: report back to management and continuously get better at what we do, because we can do more of the stuff that works and less of the things that don't work. That's what so important about it."

Data and a YouTube Channel

The communications team at Bloomberg lacked an outlet for video it had shot showing the quality of work life at the company. A few years back the team created a YouTube channel called Inside Bloomberg.

"One of the first things we did was for every video that was on the channel we put a bit.ly link that directed interested viewers to open job positions in the company," he says. For example, a video about the company's philanthropic work in Singapore had a link to open positions in Bloomberg's Singapore office.

Now with more than 7,000 subs, the channel has resulted in numerous new employees. "We used these data to show how we reduce cost in recruiting and maybe attract candidates that we otherwise wouldn't have found," he says.

Through measurement "we were able to get a better sense of what's actually playing (well) for this audience. That's influenced how we produced [these in-house] videos. The quality gets better and the yield gets better." Each year the team has tracked an increasing number of candidates who've come in via the video door.

Serial Readers

McCarty's team at Bloomberg, he says, was highly oriented toward "iteration based on observable data...we inspected the data across all our platforms" from internal newsletters to external blogs "pretty much every day." That's led to some interesting operational changes.

For example, the team broke away from the usual tendency to address a subject internally with a huge article. Most companies try to write articles about an important subject that is a comprehensive, loaded with facts, figures and expert opinions. When it's done, the article is enormous. Bloomberg's communications team did this, too.

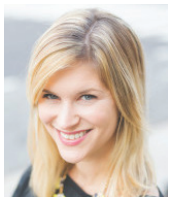
Through measurement, the team observed such articles would get about 15% of the company to read it. "That makes sense," he says. "If it's an article about sales, maybe the sales team reads it and that could be about 15% of the company, which is fine. But when we have stories meant to be global, about

the company's direction or culture, we want everyone to read it."

What the team discovered through measurement is that a better bet is a series of articles, perhaps one per month, on a given subject. "And when we looked at the data we found that we get something like 80% penetration of the whole company. Maybe 80% of the people at the company read one [article in the series]...[and so] they all get that message. That's been a guiding principle of our editorial strategy for the last three and a half years."

Another tidbit: Bloomberg's most-opened emailed newsletters have 15 or fewer characters in their subject line.

Green With Data



Marisa Long
VP PR &
Communications,
U.S. Green
Building Council

One of the savviest communicators in Washington, D.C., Marisa Long, VP, PR & communications, U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), immediately dismisses thoughts that she's completely comfortable working with social and communications data. "It can be daunting...and a little humbling," she admits. "But it is one of the things I love most about what I do." Long particularly likes the ability to measure and "take our work to the next level."

Like McCarty, she learned data on the job and the education is constant: "I learn as much from our staff...as I do from my mentors in the industry."

Long, like McCarty, is a proud Ohio University grad, where she studied journalism at the Scripps School of Journalism. The school, she says, "rightly prides itself on being at the forefront of industry trends and education to prepare its students for their careers."

Yet at the time of her education, fewer than 20 years ago, "we were still faxing press releases, scanning hard copies of media clips

and just starting to see journalist data bases and measurement tools online."

It's amazing how the industry has evolved, she says, to the point where "we are completely reliant on online data and metrics to do our jobs. I've really had to learn how to navigate this digital landscape on the job throughout my career."

While some PR pros see measurement as a chore that helps justify their existence to the C-suite, Long's job at USGBC makes using data part of the culture. USGBC created LEED, the world's most widely used green building rating system. "LEED's success is rooted in using data and measurement to set the bar and create a more sustainable built environment," she says. "I'm fortunate to work for an organization where using data to make informed decisions is ingrained in the culture and an expectation of the job."

One of the more interesting insights Long and her team at USGBC have discovered through measurement involves external communications. During the last several years USGBC has advanced its stakeholder engagement strategy as part of its PR campaigns. This has resulted in better local coverage in target markets, in the U.S. and internationally. "As a mission-based nonprofit, we know the best way for us to tell our story is to get our community to share theirs. Our measurement and data tracking show that this strategy works at the local, regional and global scale."

Data reporting has changed recently at USGBC. Long's team moved from quarterly to monthly reports and switched monitoring systems "so that we could create more visuals with our measurement data." Creating a regular maintenance and monitoring routine, she says, will help the team "stay on top of our results and share them with our leaders more frequently and efficiently." Also, for the first time, Long's team created an in-house video in 2017 that provided an overview of the work of the entire marketing department throughout the year. It was shown at the end-of-the-year all-staff meeting.

Data Plus Heart Takes flight



Brooks Thomas
Social Business
Advisor,
Southwest Airlines

A gifted storyteller, Southwest Airlines social business advisor Brooks Thomas got a feel for numbers at Southern Methodist University, but it wasn't social measurement. With a degree in broadcast journalism, he started to gain an appreciation for Nielsen

ratings and viewership, particularly ages 25-54.

"I learned early the importance of relating a solid news product to numbers," he says. Social media was confined to college-only Facebook, so he gained his measurement chops on the job.

Like Long and McCarty, Thomas is enmeshed in a data culture at work. At Southwest Airlines, he says, "the data charts our course and our hearts lead the way." Knowing customers, prospective and current, and employees through measurement and instinct, "allows us to best serve their needs. If our storytelling was born only out of what we thought was good for everyone, then it would be narrow-minded and niche."

More than that, data sometimes moves Thomas and his colleagues in unexpected directions. "We must force ourselves to be comfortable outside of what we know; data often can tell us when or how to pivot, ahead of our own instincts."

A Story of Cargo and Data

Recently Thomas has been working with the airline's cargo & charters department. Part of his charge is to spread the word that Southwest ships just like traditional shipping companies. He's using data to inform Southwest how to build out a bigger social and digital footprint. "One of the ways to identify an audience, of course, is through content."

Thomas is diving into different commodity data points to examine seasonality, volume and approachability, both attitudinally and visually. From there, Southwest reached out to cargo customers to gauge their interest in being featured in a storytelling series.

Thomas says the airline used data points and optimization throughout each story in the series to cut the cost per lead (CPL) in half. "The more of these we do, the deeper down the funnel we'll be able to refine, and it's exciting because not only is it increasing our cargo customer base, but it's also great for general brand awareness."

Hearty Cooking

For Thomas, it's a combination of data and heart that creates the secret sauce. "Qualitative data matters so much, but oftentimes needs to be activated by the quant. Having a good foundation of creativity, compassion, and ethics cannot be replaced, but neither can numbers...the numbers tell you where to begin, but your heart should be where you end." ■

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