

Chapter Eight: Research

Based on Seitel on The Practice of Public Relations

Why research?

Research is the natural starting point for any PR initiative.

- ❑ Managers want results and proof of performance.
- ❑ Clients are less interested in what we *think* than what we *know*.





It's the essential first step

- Although instinct and intuition are important, they're no way to begin a PR campaign
- Managers want *proof*: they demand measurement, analysis, and evaluation at every stage of the public relations process
- These days, resources are scarce, and money can't be spent unless it contributes to bottom-line business objectives

So what is research?

Research is the systematic collection and interpretation of information to increase understanding.



This early example of research depicts the return of biblical scouts sent by Moses to explore the land of Canann. Failure to interpret their data correctly caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years!



Key research questions:

- How can we identify and define constituent groups?
- How does this knowledge relate to message design?
- How does it relate to the design of our programs?
- How does it relate to how we select media?
- How does it relate to how we schedule media?
- How does it relate to implementation of tactics?

The real research challenge is:

- Knowing when to conduct it
- What needs to be considered
- With whom
- For what purpose

Guest Satisfaction Survey

Our records indicate that you recently had reservations at the hotel shown above on the date indicated.

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Do not use red ink.
- Do not use a marker that will bleed through the page.
- You may use pencil or pen to complete this survey.

Please be sure to fill the response oval completely.

CORRECT MARK INCORRECT MARKS

*Please take a moment and answer the following questions.
If a question is not applicable to your stay, please skip to the next question.*

How would you rate our hotel on:

1. QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATIONS...

	EXCELLENT	POOR
Cleanliness of your guest room upon entering	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Cleanliness and servicing of your room during stay	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Overall cleanliness of bathroom	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Cleanliness of tub and tile	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Overall cleanliness of bedroom	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Condition of bedspread	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
Overall guest room quality	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	

Everything in your room in working order? Yes No

Overall maintenance and upkeep 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Condition of the grounds 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Condition of the lobby area 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Condition of the restaurants and lounges 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Functionality of guest room 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Condition of pool and pool area 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

What was your room number? _____

Please share any comments you may have about the quality of our rooms, lobby, and outside areas.

2. QUALITY OF HOTEL STAFF AND SERVICES...

Did you make your room reservation through the hotel? Yes No

When you arrived at the hotel, was the information the hotel had concerning your reservation correct? Yes No

Seven guiding principles for setting PR research standards

- Clear program objectives and outcomes tied to goals
- Differentiating between measuring outputs and outcomes
- Measuring media content in evaluation
- Consideration of multiple measurement techniques
- Consider differences in effectiveness of tools
- Measurement of overall effectiveness stems from clearly identified key messages, target audiences, and desired channels of communication.



In general, we use research to:

- describe a process, situation, or phenomenon.
- explain why something is happening, its causes, and what effect it will have.
- predict what probably will happen if we do or don't take action.



Three major types of research:

1. Applied research
2. Theoretical research
3. Secondary research



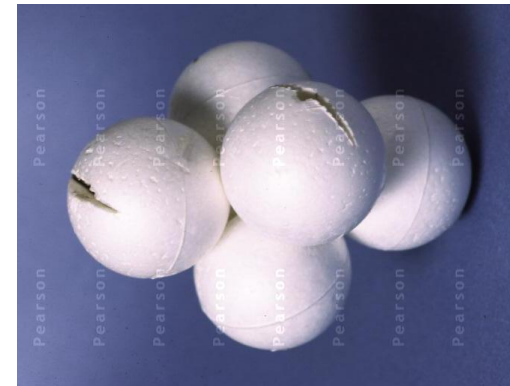
1. Applied research

- Applied research solves practical problems.
- It can be strategic or evaluative.
 - Strategic research is used for program development to determine objectives, message strategies, or establish benchmarks. It examines the tools and techniques of public relations.
 - Evaluative research, or summative research, to determine whether a program met its goals and objectives. It can be applied to monitor progress.

2. Theoretical research

It is more abstract and conceptual, and helps build theories in PR work about:

- why people communicate
- how public opinion is formed
- how a public is created



Theoretical research provides a foundation for understanding applied research findings.

3. Secondary research

This type of research utilizes data collected by someone else.
Examples of sources include:

- industry trade journals
- government information
- websites
- informal contacts
- public records
- census data
- professional organizations

Three methods of PR research

1. Surveys

2. Communication
audits

3. Unobtrusive
measures



S I D E B A R

Online Public Relations Resources

You say you want to use the Net for additional public relations knowledge? (How could you need more knowledge, when you're reading the world's greatest public relations textbook?!? Just kidding.) Well, here is where you might turn.

Free Publicity

6 Horizon Road
Fort Lee, NJ 07024
www.PublicityInsider.com

The Holmes Report

www.holmesreport.com

Interactive Public Relations

316 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 300
Chicago, IL 60601
www.ragan.com/ipr

Media Bridge Newsletter

www.themediabridge.com

Media Relations Insider

5900 Hollis Street
Suite R2
Emeryville, CA 94608
www.infocomgroup.com/mri.html

O'Dwyer's Newsletter

271 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
www.odwyerpr.com

Online PR Workshop

316 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 300
Chicago, IL 60601
www2.ragan.com/onlinepr/4

PR Intelligence Report

316 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60601
www.ragan.com/pri

PR Reporter

P.O. Box 600
Exeter, NH 03833-0600
www.prpublishing.com

PR WEEK (UK)

174 Hammersmith Road
London, ENGLAND W6 7JP
www.prweek.com

PR WEEK (US)

PR Publications Ltd.
220 Fifth Avenue
14th Floor
New York, NY 10001
www.prweek.com

Ragan Report

316 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 300
Chicago, IL 60601
www.ragan.com

The Source and Strategic Communications Management

First Floor, Chelsea Reach, 79-89 Lots Road, London SW10 0RN.
www.melcram.com

The Strategist/PR Tactics

33 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003-2376
www.prsa.org

Web Content Report

316 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 300
Chicago, IL 60601
www.ragan.com/wcr

Courtesy of the Council of Public Relations.

1. Survey research

- This is one of the most frequently used research methods in PR
- Surveys are used to measure attitudes, opinions, behaviors
- The two types of surveys are:
 - Descriptive
 - Explanatory



How do the two differ?

- Descriptive surveys describe a condition or situation — they answer “what.”
- Explanatory surveys explain a condition or situation. They provide insights into cause and effect — they answer “why.”

Surveys consist of four elements:

- ❑ Sample
- ❑ Questionnaire
- ❑ Interview
- ❑ Analysis of results



The sample

The sample refers to selected target group representative of the total public.

Always remember:

- Data is perishable and dynamic, so complete sampling quickly.
- Sampling must be conducted with accuracy.

Types of sampling

Random Sampling

Keys:

- Equality: every element has an equal chance of selection
- Independence: selection of one element does not influence selection of any others.

Generalizations from the sample are made to the population.

Types of random sampling

1. Simple random sampling—
every person has an equal
chance of selection.
2. Systematic random sampling
 - Random starting point
on the sample list, with
every n th person
selected.
3. Stratified Random
Sampling
 - Stratified to survey
segments of the
population.
4. Cluster sampling
 - Breaks down
population into
homogenous
subsets or clusters.

Nonrandom sampling

This is broken down into three types:

1. Convenience samples: Accidental, chunk or opportunity samples; unstructured and unsystematic.
2. Quota samples: The researcher chooses subjects based on specific characteristics.
3. Volunteer samples: These utilize willing participants who agree to respond.

The questionnaire

Before creating a questionnaire, ask yourself about the:

- ❑ Objective of the research
- ❑ Scope
- ❑ Publics
- ❑ Method of research
- ❑ Design



Questionnaire design elements

- Keep it short
- Use structured questions
- Measure intensity of feelings
- Clear understandable language
- No loaded questions
- Pre-test
- No double barreled questions
- Include letter of intent
- Hand stamp envelopes with unique stamps
- Follow-up post card
- Send out more questionnaires than needed
- Enclose a reward

Interviews

Interviews can provide a more personal, firsthand feel for public opinion. They can be conducted face-to-face, via the telephone, mail or Internet. Formats include:

- Focus groups
- Telephone interviews
- Mail interviews
- Delphi panels
- Intranet interviews
- Drop-off interviews
- Intercept interviews

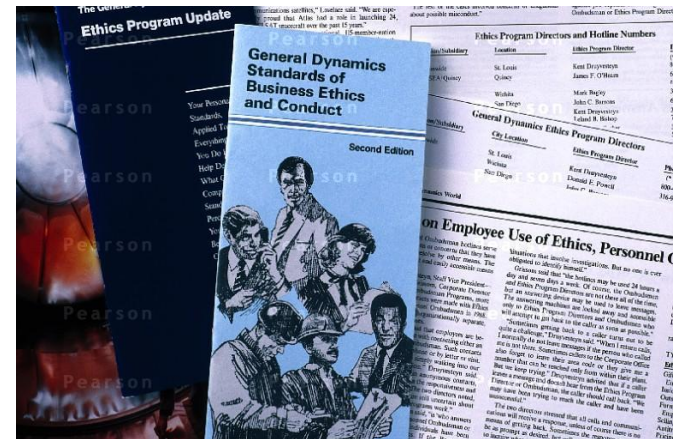
Results analysis

Now it's time to take a look at what you really have. This is a key step in order to make meaningful recommendations.

- ❑ Were the results both valid and reliable?
- ❑ What is the margin of error?
- ❑ Were the results statistically significant?
- ❑ Was the study conducted appropriately and ethically?

Communications audits

- Used to determine communication consistency, effectiveness, validity of relationships, and methods.
- Involves analysis of internal and external communication channels.
- Researchers must consider:
 - Scope
 - Subjects
 - Methodology



Unobtrusive methods

Often, research can be as simple as looking around you.

Consider:

- Fact-finding: read organizational files, publications, biographies, press clippings, media lists, literature, charters, and by-laws.
- Content analysis: describes a message or set of messages utilizing categories such as frequency of coverage, placement, reach, message conveyed, editing, and attitude conveyed.
- Copy testing: target publics are exposed to PR campaign messages in advance of publication. This helps ensure that messages are understandable and effective.



Evaluation: what happened and why?

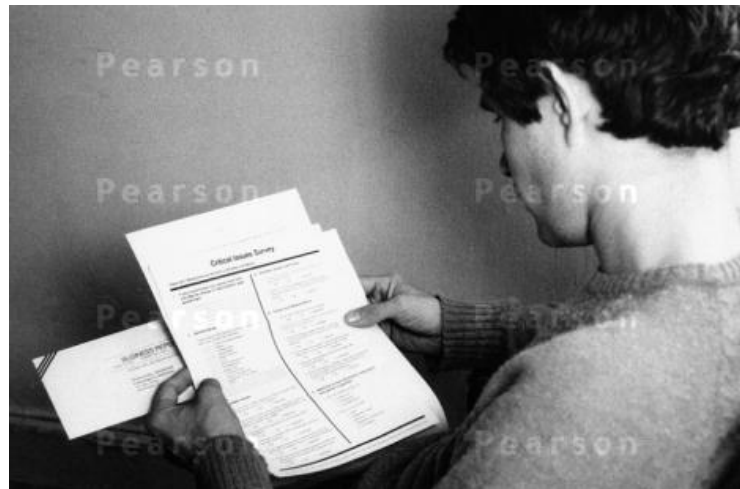
Successful evaluation depends on:

1. Setting measurable PR program objectives
2. Securing management commitment
3. Determining the best way to gather data
4. Reporting back to management
5. Selecting the most appropriate outcomes

Accountability is the key word. Resources are limited, and management expects it.

Types of measurable outcomes

- ❑ Awareness and comprehension measurement
- ❑ Recall and retention measurement
- ❑ Attitude and preference measurement
- ❑ Behavior measurements





Research and the Web

Key questions to ask when evaluating a website:

- ❑ How much traffic is coming to the site?
- ❑ What pages are people looking at?
- ❑ How often do they go beyond the homepage?
- ❑ What do they find most useful and interesting?
- ❑ What parts never get looked at?
- ❑ Where do visitors come from?
- ❑ Is the site functioning as expected?

What about doing web-based research?

Follow these steps:

- Establish objectives
- Determine criteria
- Determine benchmarks
- Select the right measurement tool
- Compare results to objectives
- Draw actionable conclusions



And finally.....

- Outside research consultants can provide valuable assistance and specialized expertise.
- First determine whether research has already been done in your area.
- You may not have to re-invent the wheel.