11 Marketing Communications Research and Evaluation

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"I know that half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half." This 19th century quote attributed to retailer and US postmaster John Wanamaker (Compaine & Cunningham, 2010) continues to resonate for today's marketers as they try to account for the effectiveness and efficiency of their promotional and communications activity. Measuring the effectiveness of marketing communications is a challenge amplified by the plethora of new media opportunities, communications tools and also the increasing numbers of stakeholders influencing organisational goals. Moreover, target audiences are increasingly fragmented and global, further increasing complexity for those wishing to research and evaluate communications activity. This chapter will discuss the research commonly undertaken by marketers whilst planning, developing, implementing and analysing communications tactics. It also considers how the strategic and integrated marketing communications efforts are evaluated in the longer term.

Starting out – communication planning

Advertising spend in the UK in 2015 was etimated at over £18 billion (AA/WARC, 2014). This is significant for both the economy and any organisation be it a small business, global firm or non-commercial organisation. Many organisations spend large amounts of money but are unsure of the short and long term

consequences of their investment, and whether results can be fully attributed to their communications campaign. Alongside effectiveness there is the need to measure efficiency and to question whether fewer resources might have been employed with similar outcomes. However, an efficient campaign that is not effective is not worthwhile. Research during the planning stages will help the marketing team forecast possible campaign outcomes, timeframes and costs.

One of the first tasks for the planning team is to consider the campaign objectives, i.e. what the campaign is expected to achieve. The objectives of communication effort influences both the strategy employed and how ultimately to measure the success or otherwise of the campaign. Sales metrics may be appropriate where the objective is to build market share, but if the aim is to achieve shifts in brand positioning then prior and post campaign attitude measures will be needed. A highly integrated campaign requires intricate research to provide an understanding of the contribution of each tool, employed alongside an evaluation to show how the methods worked holistically.

Table11.1: Secondary research sources for objective setting.

Research type and source	Sample data	Rationale
Academic research: Journals Conferences	How communication works- theoretical and empirical data Consumer behaviour theory Case studies of communications practice	Broad guidelines for objective setting, creative treatments and potential methods
Industry data: Trade and consumer press Trade association reports Commercially produced market research Government reports	**Customer:** Market size and share Demographic and other segmentation data Competitor insight Industry reports **Other stakeholders:** Share price movement Average salaries Top employers lists	Realistic and quantified objectives. Target audiences Industry benchmarks. Customer insight and behaviour
In house (internal) data: Accounting information Previous customer research HR databases CRM systems Historical communication activity results.	**Customer:** Number of current and lapsed customers Sales channels Profitability by customer/ acquisition point Sales trends Acquisition and retention data Customer satisfaction data **Other stakeholders:** Staff turnover figures Historical campaign results	Determining what needs to be achieved Setting baselines

Secondary research data generated from both internal and external sources should be the first port of call for an organisation to set objectives that are realistic and achievable.

Once objectives have been agreed then the research required to help campaign development comes into focus.

Campaign development

This section will consider the research and testing required throughout the campaign development process, from initial idea generation to campaign development (including media and tool choice) as shown below.

Figure 11.1: Campaign development process

■ Idea generation

Secondary research provides competitor and sector insight; audience profiles and media usage research provide consumer knowledge to spark creativity. Consumer and employee based primary research methods are also used to generate and develop promotional campaigns.

User studies and other qualitative techniques such as brainstorming, group discussions, in-depth interviews and projective techniques will generate and filter creative ideas. Ethnographic methods have been used by consumer goods manufacturers such as Proctor and Gamble (Zaltman, 2003) to provide insight into how consumers use products in everyday life. Such data is structured around incidents to reveal the "dramatic heart" (Cayla & Arnould, 2013: 8) of the narrative and insight to emotions. Crowdsourcing of ideas and user generated content from customers is seen as useful for idea generation and iterative testing (see Petavy, 2014; Dickinson-Delaporte & Kerr, 2015).

Typically both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to generate two or three approaches for more detailed concept or pre-testing.

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