



Guide to Media Evaluation

1. What is the purpose of Media Evaluation?

Good strategic management of corporate and marketing communication requires clear vision, planning and review. Effective communication for business is now essential in a world of increasing managerial accountability, new media development and stakeholder demand. The challenge is to demonstrate effectiveness and to better inform management decision making. Good management requires good measurement.

The sound professional judgment of communicators, based on clear goals and objectives, can now be supported by good research to monitor media profile, progress and achievement at appropriate intervals. In this way resource can be better allocated to deliver greatest effect for the success of the company or organisation and its ability to stay competitive and successful.

The purpose of media evaluation is to provide communicators with the specialised tools and IT support which professionals in other fields have come to regard as second nature.

2. What forms can it take?

As with all research, successful organisations buy media evaluation in many different forms, depending on purpose and objective. Research briefs are best built to the requirements of each individual client, unless syndicated data is available. Typical projects can range from individual campaign analysis to continuous international competitor tracking. Some simply track broad favourability by target audience, while others break down media coverage to release sophisticated market intelligence about individual brands.

Media evaluation tests for many values but the more important are concerned with the positive and negative significance (sometimes called favourable and unfavourable) of the coverage and its potential impact by referring to the incidence and location, weight of the content, factors within the content, size of space or duration in broadcast, position and prominence, and audience reached.

All media evaluation companies have different methodologies but, whichever particular system is applied, broadly similar conclusions should be reached given the same set of coverage and the same brief. It is a matter for each client to determine which individual methodology they prefer, but there are certain quality markers set out in the next paragraph which apply universally.

All terminology and methodologies used should be clearly explained by the supplier or potential supplier. The following points should be covered:

- The method of coding (i.e. the system of recording information about each individual story), the nature and type of staff used to do it, and the quality control systems which must be transparent and verifiable;
- The rules and precepts used for the assessment of positive or negative (or favorable / unfavorable) significance;
- Where weights are used for prominence and other factors within a multidimensional formula or algorithm (eg mention in headline, repetition of organisation name, position on page or in broadcast running order, pictures/graphic content, number of words, amount of item devoted to the subject) the contribution of these factors to the calculation must be explained;
- Where a uni-dimensional measure (eg Opportunities To See, the number of words, the number of articles or of column centimeters) is used the supplier must explain to the client that other contributing factors to media impact should also be taken into account, (eg a simple OTS measure disregards the proportion of space in the story devoted to the subjects being analyzed, and a simple measure of column centimeters disregards the number of people exposed to the coverage);
- Where circulation and audience data is used it must be updated as soon as new data is published, and the date and sources must always be clearly stated. Any calculations using unverified or non-authenticated data (which may arise in the case of new publications) must be clearly identified as such;
- And finally, copyright and ownership of the analysis must be clearly stated.

3. How to brief an agency

To get a clear idea of how an evaluation company can help it is important to discuss with them the whole outline of the project. Evaluation companies will always be prepared to discuss these things with you, and without obligation. This checklist is designed to help you prepare for such a discussion.

What are your objectives and information needs, and how do you believe Media evaluation can help meet these needs? The supplier needs to be able to understand the full context of your request and may also be able to meet some of these broader needs, or at least, structure the evaluation project to fit with other data sources you may be using.

Who are your key target audiences? Some suppliers may be able to provide information on the level of your success in reaching specific target audiences through your media coverage. How valuable would this be to you?

What are the broad (or specific) issues that you wish to be addressed in any media analysis? Your media coverage may cover other issues (eg negative ones) that may be worth including. What are your communications objectives?

What are the key messages you wish to track? Try to ensure they are concise enough to be articulated in the print and broadcast media, but also defined with sufficient precision to allow the supplier to provide accurate results. Consider also those likely to be communicated by competitors.

Which are the media of relevance to you? Consider your audiences, your needs and your budget. Local media may account for the bulk of your press cuttings or transcripts but may account for a minority of your impact, and broadcast media may be important but expensive to source.

What scale of coverage do you expect, and in which countries, languages and media? A substantial part of the cost of a project will be related to the total number of items to be analysed. Costs will increase if the media coverage analysed is in several languages, or if audio and visual materials are involved.

Do you need to benchmark your media coverage? If so, against whom, and what scale of coverage do you expect them to achieve?

Will you be providing cuttings and transcripts and do you want them back? Issues of copyright will need to be addressed. Do you want the evaluation company to supply the materials, and if so what is their reading list? How do they check everything has been included? Or, do you want them to advise you on how to set up a competitor analysis contract with press cuttings agency and/or broadcast monitoring agency?

How often do you require reports or presentations, and in what form? More frequent reporting can make a significant impact on the budget. Most suppliers can report in a variety of different ways including hard copy, computer presentation, OHP slide, e-mail, memorandum or bound volume.

What time period do you want to cover?

If you have the material or if the items are available from online sources you might be able to go back in time to obtain benchmark comparisons.

4. How to choose an agency

After you have discussed your brief with several suppliers you will need to select one of them which can only be a matter of judgment. But this checklist may help ensure you have asked all the right questions.

What forms of analyses do they offer or would recommend? There is a wide range of forms of analysis on offer. Ask for the precise definitions used in any analysis because the same terminology is sometimes used to mean rather different forms of analysis, especially when related to AVEs or OTS. Which sources of data are to be used to provide circulation or audience figures?

What quality control procedures are in place to check on the quality of their coding and processing? This is vital. You might also consider whether or not the proposed supplier belongs to AMEC. If not, is there a good reason?

What processes are involved, and who does the research? You may wish to meet or brief the research team, or at least know about their backgrounds.

What is their experience of similar projects? Having done something similar before is not a guarantee of a good job, but it is likely to be a very relevant issue. Ask for client references or contacts, and talk to them.

What are their recommendations as to research design and the media to be covered? You may have your own ideas, but take advantage of the free advice that each company will offer at the proposal stage.

How do they present their findings? Ensure that the form in which the results are presented meets your needs. If you wish to have a simple presentation or management summary, you may not wish to be buried under a mound of computer tables. On the other hand, you might want to access the data to check the findings, or for your own reference later. Ask for an example of presentation format. Consider the benefits of using electronic delivery.

Can they offer further services that might enhance their value to you?

It may be that they can offer services, such as survey research or media consultancy, that can enhance the value they provide. Ask them what is available.

What will they charge and why?

If two suppliers are quoting substantially different prices, it is most likely that they are offering very different levels of service or analysis. What, exactly, is included in the price and what is not? How will they charge for extra work? How will their charges vary if the project specification varies? Because the scale of coverage is not usually known in advance, most evaluation companies will quote a rate for the marginal cost of adding additional items to the analysis.

5. How to use Media Evaluation to best effect

Evaluation companies want to help their clients make the most of the work they undertake and all of them know from past experience some of the common pitfalls.

This is a checklist for success in ten golden rules:

- **Set your objectives carefully:** all good research starts here
- **Define your target audiences:** who, when, where, and why?
- **Identify your key messages:** write them down, be clear and consistent
- **It's the content that counts:** consider what issues affect you and your sector
- **Don't just think about your own coverage:** consider your competitors too
- **Watch for bias:** when sourcing materials and interpreting the results
- **Decide what output or report you need:** not what others want to sell you
- **Win commitment at Board level:** by demonstrating measured results
- **Share results with other departments:** their interest may help share the budget
- **Use the results:** this is for planning and sharing, not for sitting on the shelf.