

Measurement and Your ABC Portfolio

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In choosing two communications projects for your portfolio submission, the most common source of anxiety is the question, “Do I have enough measurement for my portfolio to be accepted for accreditation?”

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the measurement discussion in a portfolio summary – but Chicago-area ABCs and accreditation candidates have the following general suggestions:

- Each objective must be measured. In the measurement section of your portfolio write-up, repeat each objective and show how you measured it. Make it very obvious to the evaluators, who have limited time to read multiple portfolio summaries. Don’t forget to relate each of your measures to a baseline.
- Don’t panic if you didn’t have the time or funding to do formal research, such as a readership survey. Focus instead on finding things that you can measure, both quantitative and qualitative. Spark some ideas by thinking about the three types of measures listed below and how they might apply to your project:
 - 1. Output measurement:** Is it accurate? Timely? Were your key messages communicated to the right audiences? For example, one accreditation portfolio on a brochure redesign discussed before-and-after readability measures (moving from a sixth-grade reading level to a 10th-grade reading level) and brochure usage data.
 - 2. Outtake measurement:** Is the target audience engaged? Did they read it and understand it? For example, one accreditation portfolio on a Y2K communications project focused primarily on output measurement – but included qualitative evidence of client understanding: an e-mail quoting a client who said he knew exactly what the company was doing to cope with Y2K and furthermore, had complete confidence that things would be fine.
 - 3. Outcome measurement:** Did members of the target audience change their behavior as a result of the communication project? For example, a communications program providing a framework for supervisors to talk with employees about a particular topic was judged a success when 70 percent of the employees reported speaking with supervisors about the topic, up from 65 percent.
- Obviously, you need to relate your communications objectives to business objectives – but don’t be over-ambitious. For a large, complex project, the best measurable objective might be accurate and timely communications to all major stakeholders (i.e., output measurement). Let’s use merger communications as an example. Management undoubtedly hopes that good communication influences employee or customer retention after a merger, but such measures would be difficult to relate to a previous benchmark and one would expect attrition after a business change of this magnitude.
- Although you might use a Gold Quill-style format to summarize your project, remember that this is not a Gold Quill entry that has to occur within a single calendar year. Sometimes, a

two-year or 18-month timeframe affords greater opportunity for measurement. And if the project concluded a few months ago and you just came up with a great idea for measuring its success, go for it.

- Talk to Marketing and other departments. They may have gathered data that could be invaluable. Remember that IABC maintains the confidentiality of all portfolio submissions, so business-sensitive metrics would not be made public or used in any way. (The sole exception is when ABCs give permission to post a sample portfolio online as an example for accreditation candidates – and even then, the company name typically is redacted.)

A side benefit about investigating business metrics being gathered by other departments: You might be able to learn more about measurement best practices from an expert on staff.

- Segment your audience. For example, you could do a quick phone survey of an audience subset to gain a qualitative indicator of your success in meeting a communications objective. The results would be considered a directional indicator rather than a quantitatively rigorous snapshot of the entire target audience. Also, bear in mind that people tend to be more comfortable providing negative responses to a third-party survey that does not identify them as a respondent.
- Investigate low- or no-cost resources. For example, SurveyMonkey offers a free option (a basic subscription) that allows you to send a 10-question online survey and receive up to 100 responses per survey – and all responses are completely private. For comparison shopping, the SurveyMonkey site displays links to other online survey companies. (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/Pricing.asp>)
- In your portfolio summary, it's perfectly appropriate to discuss what you would measure differently, now that a) you are a more experienced communicator or b) new technology is available to you.
- Be creative about asking for assistance. Let's say you have a pile of news clippings and no time (or vendor assistance) to analyze the number of positive, negative and neutral messages – and whether they contain your key messages. This analysis might be a perfect project for an undergraduate PR class.

In summary:

How did you convince management that your communication project was worthwhile?

Think about how you might measure that.