Harris Interactive®

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Newsmaker Insights®

PR NEWS YOU CAN USE

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This Edition's Focus

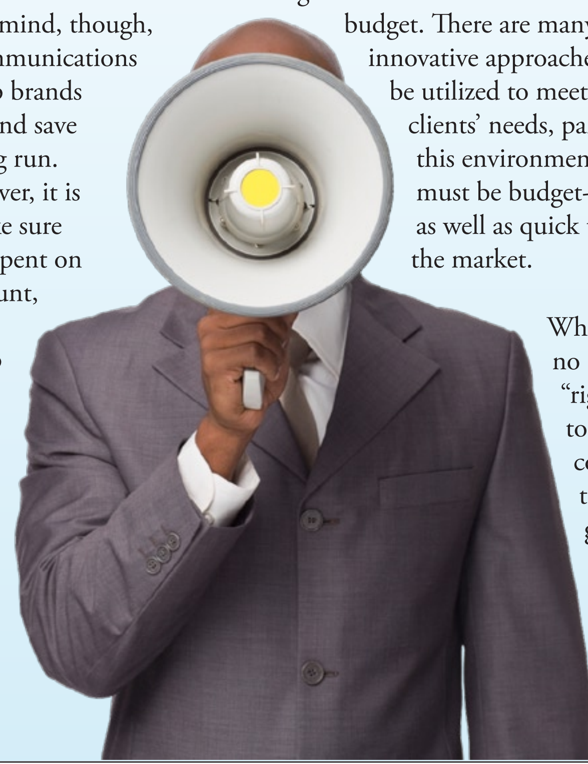
Creating, Building, and Maintaining an Effective Communications Strategy

In times of crisis, we often find ourselves making short-term plans versus focusing on long-term strategies. Nowhere has this sort of reactive versus proactive behavior become more apparent than in the current economic climate, where our clients are struggling to stay afloat, retain their staff, and keep their businesses alive. As the economy continues to decline and budgets continue to tighten, marketing and public relations programs are often the first to take a hit.

We must keep in mind, though, that the right communications strategies can help brands weather a storm and save money in the long run. Now more than ever, it is important to make sure that every dollar spent on these activities count, and the right planning can help achieve that.

There is, of course, no infallible communication technique that helps our clients "win" against all odds in the current marketplace. However, research can enhance clients' communications in every format and at every phase, from strategy formation, to concept development, to post-messaging assessment. Communications can be affected very early in the lifecycle, helping with short-term tactics while still building a long-term strategy for success.

Testing at any point in the communications lifecycle can lead to more persuasive campaigns and provide greater ROI on the PR and marketing budget. There are many different innovative approaches that can be utilized to meet individual clients' needs, particularly in this environment where we must be budget-conscious as well as quick to react to the market.



While there is no universal "right" way to approach communications strategies, Harris Interactive does operate

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using some guiding principles we have developed and tested over time. In this issue, we will discuss those five principles and explain how you can use research to enhance your clients' communications strategies, regardless of where in the communications process you are.

Guiding Principles for an Effective Communications Strategy

When developing a communications strategy, there are five principles that should lead the process.

1. ***People make decisions based on a complex interplay of cognitive and emotional benefits.*** Tangible and intangible characteristics of a brand, product, or service make them important and personally relevant to stakeholders, creating powerful bonds between an enterprise and its customers, employees, and investors. These bonds endure over time and can assist a company in times of crisis.

2. ***Every brand is associated with both equities and disequities in the minds of its stakeholders.*** In order to strengthen the bonds between an enterprise and its key stakeholders, you must increase the equities (strengths) and reduce the disequities (weaknesses) each stakeholder group associates with the brand. A good communications plan will leverage the brand's strengths in the short-term while neutralizing its weaknesses in the long-term.

3. ***Stakeholder decisions are made in the context of specific situations and occasions.*** These situations are part of a broader environment in which a company operates, including the competitive landscape, interrelationships between stakeholder groups, and other situational factors. Successful strategies are framed with an understanding of this broad context and how it changes over time. The current economic climate is probably the most obvious example, but there could also be specific issues at play in different markets which should also be considered.

4. ***Not all stakeholders are created equal.*** An effective strategy utilizes techniques to identify and set a relative value to each stakeholder group and subgroup in ways that are meaningful and actionable. This level of insight enables a company to prioritize, target, plan, and execute in order to affect each stakeholder segment effectively and efficiently, thus maximizing the return on investment. For example, there may be a handful of stakeholders that influence everyone else – if communications are focused on these individuals, they will likely yield the most bang for the buck.

5. ***The value of a strategy is its ability to deliver measurable returns to the enterprise.*** Effective programs require measurement to monitor the impact of communications efforts and thereby manage the overall enterprise equity. To optimize your efforts and make every dollar count, it is important to track the effectiveness of the communications over time to ensure that you and your clients are getting what you want out of your strategy.

These are five tried-and-true principles that we apply to everything we do in helping our clients – and their clients – develop their communications strategies. With these principles in mind, there are a variety of quantitative and qualitative tools along the message testing continuum that can be used to help develop and maintain effective campaigns and strategies.

The following case studies highlight three real-world examples of how we have used research based on these guiding principles to help inform clients' communications campaigns. The research tools described here can

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What is PulseLine?

PulseLine is a computer-based group research system for measuring audience response to communications messages. Each session includes between 20 and 40 targeted respondents from key stakeholder groups. Each person uses a small hand-held device to record his or her reactions – second by second – to the stimulus presented or to the questions posed by the moderator. The stimulus can be in just about any format, for example, a storyboard, a sketched or finished advertisement, a live action or recorded speech or interview, etc.

Continuous Mode – audience members react to what they are hearing and seeing each moment by turning a dial to represent positive to negative feelings or any other scale desired. The groups' continuous response is displayed graphically and numerically in the form of a PulseLine score. The continuous reaction is superimposed on the stimulus for those in the 'back room' to view in real-time.

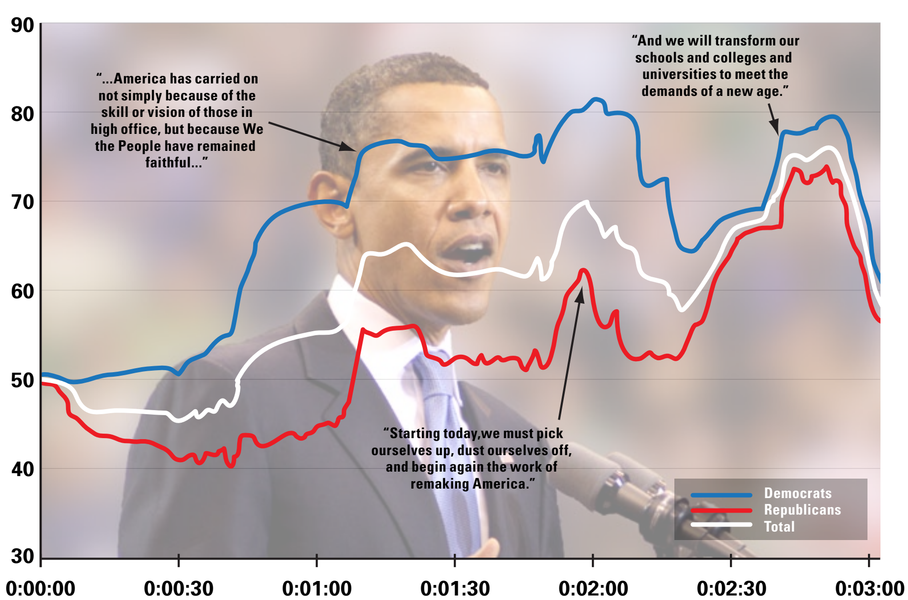
Polling Mode – audience members answer survey questions about themselves and their attitudes and opinions both before and after the stimulus is presented (pre/post measurement). Responses are available in graphic format in real-time.

Following the PulseLine session, the audience is divided into smaller focus groups. During these sessions, respondents provide the reasons behind their reactions to the stimulus and ideas for strengthening the stimulus material are explored.

Key benefits of PulseLine:

- *Immediate feedback* on stimulus material – both in aggregate and by sub-groups
- *Second-by-second reactions* that highlight specific trouble spots and 'power phrases' that are driving positive or negative reaction to the stimulus material
- *Qualitative exploration* of the reasons behind reactions to the material
- *Detailed data* to help refine the content and delivery of messages

PulseLine Assessment of President Obama's Inaugural Speech



This is an example of a PulseLine output, demonstrating the strongest and weakest message elements of President Obama's Inaugural speech and disparity between two audience sub-groups.

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be used as a diagnostic device in one aspect of a client's communications strategy, or in many instances, they can be used as part of a step-wise process to assess a holistic program.

In the Beginning – Pre-Campaign Launch

When a leading pharmaceutical company learned that awareness of their corporate initiatives and brand messaging was fairly low among key stakeholders, they decided to "introduce themselves" to the world by positioning their corporate brand apart from their individual product brands. Because they were planning a messaging overhaul, it was important to gather as much information as possible in the early stages to lay the groundwork for an effective and highly strategic 'introduction.' The client also wanted to make sure their communications would appeal on both an emotional and a rational level to the stakeholders closest to their brand: physicians, opinion leaders, consumers, and caregivers.

In order to provide direction for the campaign, the pharma company's PR agency compiled a stump speech that consisted of many different broad themes and key message elements. They wanted to assess this communication to determine which elements resonated most with their key audiences. To test the speech, we used the PulseLine technology to garner reactions from key stakeholders. This technology, also seen on CNN during the 2008 election, brings respondents together in a room and gives them each a hand-held device that allows them

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What is Hi-brid Insights?

The Harris Interactive HI-brid Insights system provides the depth of qualitative research and the breath of quantitative research – all in one session. HI-brid Insights is an online, real-time research session comprised of anywhere from 50 to 300 respondents. The session format blends the rich opinions and flexibility of a focus group with the large sample and quantitative questioning of a survey – all in a real-time environment with powerful analytics and instant reports.

During a HI-brid session, a Harris Interactive moderator asks participants prepared quantitative and open-ended questions, as well as impromptu questions that are based on issues that surface during the session. The HI-brid system tabulates the question responses in real time, allowing the study team to witness the results as they happen:

Quantitatively – The platform automatically calculates response percentages for each question posed.

Qualitatively – The HI-brid system automatically presents verbatim responses, identifies key words and phrases, and provides a random polling option for respondents to vote on answers provided by other members of the session.

Key benefits of HI-brid:

- *Immediate feedback* – reduce the cycle time for testing new ideas by combining multiple phases of research
- *Better insights* – explore the reasons behind responses with large targeted samples
- *Smarter decision-making* – target respondents to include key stakeholder groups, probe and validate responses as they happen, project team has first-hand participation in data collection

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to provide two types of feedback – polling and continuous response.

In each session, we measured real-time reactions to the speech as it played through. With each round of testing, the messages were refined to reflect the new insights from the previous PulseLine sessions. Once the stump speech was solidified, we set out to further hone in on the key messages. A mock "question and answer" session was created and presented to audiences using the same PulseLine technology. Participants' reactions to the Q&A session provided guidance on how the spokesperson should respond – both in content as well as in tone.

As a result of this testing, the pharmaceutical company now has a cohesive set of messages they know work among their core audiences. These messages are incorporated into every aspect of their communications platform. In the end, the company has been better able to communicate its value directly to stakeholders and to better position themselves against competitors, developing stronger bonds that can endure over time.

During the Campaign

Information can also be collected while a message is in circulation to help refine a communications strategy. A client that developed an alternative energy source wanted to take control of the messaging around its product and position it as a change from the status quo. Though messaging already existed around their product, the organization was not convinced that the message was as relevant in today's market. It was also important that the new messaging firmly root the product in terms that connected to both emotional and rational decision-making factors.

Working with the organization and the agency that had developed the initial concepts, we used our HI-brid Insights methodology, an online tool that combines a bulletin board setting with quantitative abilities, to test four positions the organization could take. We assessed the messages on several key metrics, including likeability, credibility, and relevance. Utilizing the combined nature of the methodology, participants were also then able to provide feedback in an open-ended format to explain the rationale behind their ratings.

Though most of the messages were successful on their own, we were able to point out the specific elements – both rational and emotional – from each position that were most positively received. As it turned out, the most positive elements were consistent across all the concepts, suggesting that whatever messaging they used should contain at least these basic elements. Surprisingly, the research also showed that tone and message order also impacted positive reception.

As a result, the organization had all the pieces it needed to construct an updated communications and positioning campaign that would resonate with their target audience.

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After the Fact – Post-Campaign Assessment

Part of any good communications strategy is to have ongoing measurement to ensure that your messages are still on point and likely to effect the perceptions and behaviors you want to change or reinforce. To this end, a national non-profit health organization wanted to measure the success of a national messaging campaign that included television, print, and radio advertising.

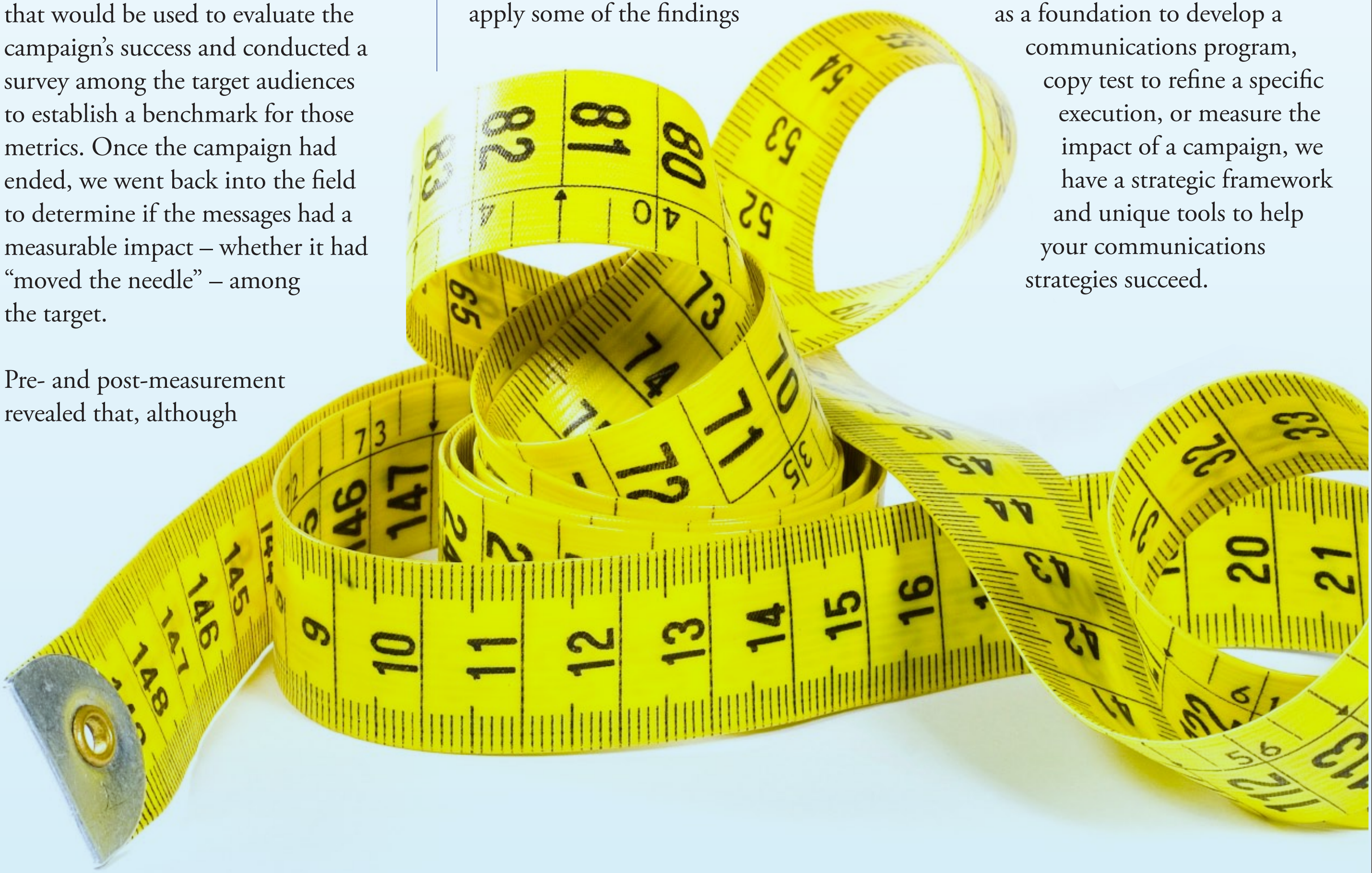
Prior to the campaign's launch, we discussed with the client the metrics that would be used to evaluate the campaign's success and conducted a survey among the target audiences to establish a benchmark for those metrics. Once the campaign had ended, we went back into the field to determine if the messages had a measurable impact – whether it had "moved the needle" – among the target.

Pre- and post-measurement revealed that, although recall of the sponsoring organization was low, awareness of the specific health issue discussed in the campaign increased dramatically among those who saw the advertisements. In addition, there was a significant positive change in the beliefs and knowledge about testing and prevention among those who recalled the advertising, suggesting that the campaign and its messages were not only memorable, but also persuasive and ultimately effective.

These findings proved the value of the communications campaign to the client and their internal stakeholders. Furthermore, the client was able to apply some of the findings from this study to improve their ongoing communications efforts, proving that research at any stage can add value to a communications strategy.

In Conclusion

These three examples demonstrate some of the qualitative and quantitative tools that we have implemented to help develop, refine, and measure communications to ensure that they are personally and positively relevant to the key stakeholder groups, thereby achieving the highest level of effectiveness toward their intended outcome. Whether your goal is to use research as a foundation to develop a communications program, copy test to refine a specific execution, or measure the impact of a campaign, we have a strategic framework and unique tools to help your communications strategies succeed.



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David Ogilvy Awards For Excellence In Advertising Research

Developing and managing a communications strategy often requires the collaboration of multiple parties to achieve a successful outcome. Many of the projects we conduct require us to work with the end-client's agencies and consultants, so we understand the dynamics of such partnerships and the success that can emanate from multi-agency collaboration. Our 16 Ogilvy awards to date – all won in collaboration with other agency partners – are a testament to our and our clients' successes.

The American Plastics Council, *1997 Ogilvy Gold Medallion Award*

The Steel Alliance, *1999 Ogilvy Grand Winner*

Lincoln Financial Group, *Ogilvy Honorable Mention*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *2002 Ogilvy Grand Winner*

Volvo, *2004 Ogilvy Award Finalist, Considered Purchases Category*

UBS, *2005 Ogilvy Winner, Service Category*

American Forest and Paper Association, *2006 Ogilvy First Runner-Up, B2B Category*

The Ad Council, *2007 Gold Award, Gov't, Public Service & Non-profit Category and Business Achievement Award*

DHL, *2007 Gold Award, B2B Category*

Chili's, *2007 Gold Award, Retail/E-tail Category*

Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority, *2007 Ogilvy Silver Award, Sports, Entertainment & Media Category*

International Dairy Foods Association (Milk), *2007 Ogilvy Silver Award, Gov't, Public Service & Non-Profit Category*

American Iron and Steel Institute, 2008 Ogilvy Silver Award, Gov't, Public Service & Non-Profit Category

Bank of America, *2009 Ogilvy Gold Award, Financial Services Category*

Bank of America, *2009 Ogilvy Gold Award, Multicultural + Insurance Category*

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Check out our new blog, *Over the Wire*, at **www.overthewire.typepad.com**.

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Q & A

Q: ***Which is more important – the rational or the emotional aspects of a stakeholder's connection with a brand?***

A: The short answer is that both are equally important. The fundamental premise of communications strategy is that one ***persuades through reason*** by highlighting the most important physical or tangible attributes of a brand, but ***motivates through emotion*** by tapping into the sentimental underpinning for the decisions people make.

Too often, communications focus only on the attributes of their brand without explaining why they are, or should be, personally relevant to the target audience. While these types of communications may raise awareness of the positive characteristics of your/your client's brand, it does not answer the 'so what?' or 'why should I care?' questions.

It also is not effective for communication to focus solely on the desired personal values for the target audience without tying this outcome specifically back to your/your client's brand. Without this connection, the audience is open to connect the desired outcome with any other competitive brand.

A good communications strategy, then, should provide the rational reasons 'why' while also creating a link to the personal values and emotions that ultimately motivate people. In an already cluttered communications environment, it is important to make these connections for the target audience and not just assume they will make the associations themselves.

Q: ***Comprehensive communications research programs sound expensive. What if I only have a budget of about $10K?***

A: Research can be useful at any point in the communications cycle and can range from larger, holistic research programs that help develop, test, and measure a communications strategy, to much smaller "disaster checks" and point-in-time measurements. The research program chosen for your/your client's organization will depend on a combination of your research objectives, the markets and audiences you'd like to target, and your/your client's budgetary constraints.

Even for a limited budget, you can conduct qualitative research online (e.g., focus groups, bulletin boards, website evaluations) or quantitative research using an omnibus approach. Omnibus surveys are priced on a per-question basis (starting at $1,100 each) and can be conducted online or by telephone. Online, even an omnibus approach enables clients to test visuals or graphics such as print ads, brand logos, or product designs.

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