

# Budget Cuts

## Feeling Vulnerable?



**Angela Jeffrey, APR**  
Vice President

PRtrak/Surveillance  
Data, Inc.  
Houston, TX

### It's Time to Start Proving Your Worth.

**In tough economic times**, PR people everywhere need to prove the value of what they produce — and the results they create — for their organizations. This is especially true in traditionally cash-strapped organizations, particularly those in higher education.

A crucial PR tool at your disposal is *publicity measurement* — that is, the tracking and placing of audience impressions and media values on the coverage you obtain for your college. By quantifying the reach and value of every media placement — and how much it might have cost to achieve similar results through purchased media time or space — you'll have metrics that help administrators understand the value of PR as part of a comprehensive marketing program.

New research released last year from PRtrak/Surveillance Data, Inc., yields indisputable proof that positive public discussion (editorial coverage) correlates with business outcomes. Not only does it

make good sense to measure your media coverage, but isn't it nice to know that what you do for a living actually works?

Ann Hatch, district director of media relations at the Dallas County Community College District, who has been measuring her coverage for years, says her administrators really want to see a price tag. "It proves the value of PR. Colleges don't usually require a story count, but when you bring in a dollar figure for the media coverage you've received, they pay attention," she says.

**A shocking 50 percent of survey respondents said they use only "intuition or gut feel" to determine the success of a media campaign.**

"In a way, you're justifying your job," adds Richard Hill, advertising and marketing coordinator at Cedar Valley

College near Dallas. Hill has been measuring results for about a year. "It's been very valuable to give our president a report saying what our placements would have cost if we had to buy the coverage. Without the measurement information, the leadership would just have to take our word for it."

The impetus for measuring results is coming from the top levels of organizations, so any PR person who isn't measuring results should seriously reconsider. In a study sponsored by PRtrak in 2001 — the *Media Relations Measurement Reality Check* — 88 percent of the respondents said they were "held more accountable than ever" for results but admitted they used analytical measurement for only 5 percent to 10 percent of their programs. A full 82 percent said they depended on "clip books and tape logs" to measure results, even though these are acknowledged as the weakest of available measurement tools. A shocking 50 percent said they use only "intuition or gut feel" to determine the success of a media campaign.

Obviously, a gut feeling isn't going to convince top administrators that your budget should be increased or, in these budget-cutting times,

*(continued on Page 6)*

## 2003-04 NCMPR Board of Directors

### PRESIDENT

**Ann B. Whiteside**  
Director, Public Relations  
Volunteer State Community College, TN

### VICE PRESIDENT/PRESIDENT-ELECT

**Richard J. Pokrass**  
Director, College Relations and  
Publications  
Burlington County College, NJ

### SECRETARY

**Anne Hansen**  
Director, Information and Marketing  
Services  
Western Nevada Community College, NV

### TREASURER

**Dolores A. Sistrunk**  
Director, Marketing and  
Communications  
Daytona Beach Community College, FL

### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

**Mark L. Petersen**  
Director, Public Relations and  
Publications  
Dixie State College of Utah, UT

### PAST PRESIDENT

**Alan Campbell**  
Associate Director for Marketing  
Eastern Iowa Community College  
District, IA

### DISTRICT 1 DIRECTOR

**Constance Herrera**  
Director of Marketing Communications  
Monroe Community College, NY

### DISTRICT 2 DIRECTOR

**J. David Russell**  
Vice President of Economic  
Development  
Ogeechee Technical College, GA

### DISTRICT 3 DIRECTOR

**Janet Hill-Getz**  
Director of Marketing and Public  
Information  
Heartland Community College, IL

### DISTRICT 4 DIRECTOR

**Melinda Eddleman**  
Media Relations Coordinator  
Del Mar College, TX

### DISTRICT 5 DIRECTOR

**Dan Torchia**  
Publications Manager  
Johnson County Community College, KS

### DISTRICT 6 DIRECTOR

**Erin Cohn**  
Public Affairs Director  
Coast Community College District, CA

### DISTRICT 7 DIRECTOR

**David Ross**  
Vice President, Financial Resources  
and Market Development  
Kwantlen University College, Canada

### DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE

**Harriet Laird**  
Director of Public Relations  
Hinds Community College, MS

### DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE

**Ann Newsmith**  
Director, College Relations  
Community College of Vermont, VT

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Becky Olson**  
NCMPR  
Greeley, CO  
(970) 330-0771

# Budget Cuts

(continued from Page 3)

merely maintained. So, it's time to think seriously about investing in, or developing, an affordable system of measurement for your own organization. Once that system is in place, not only will it be easier to place a price tag on media placements, it will be easier to match those "PR outputs" to "business outcomes" and demonstrate how the placements you get impact the goals of your organization.



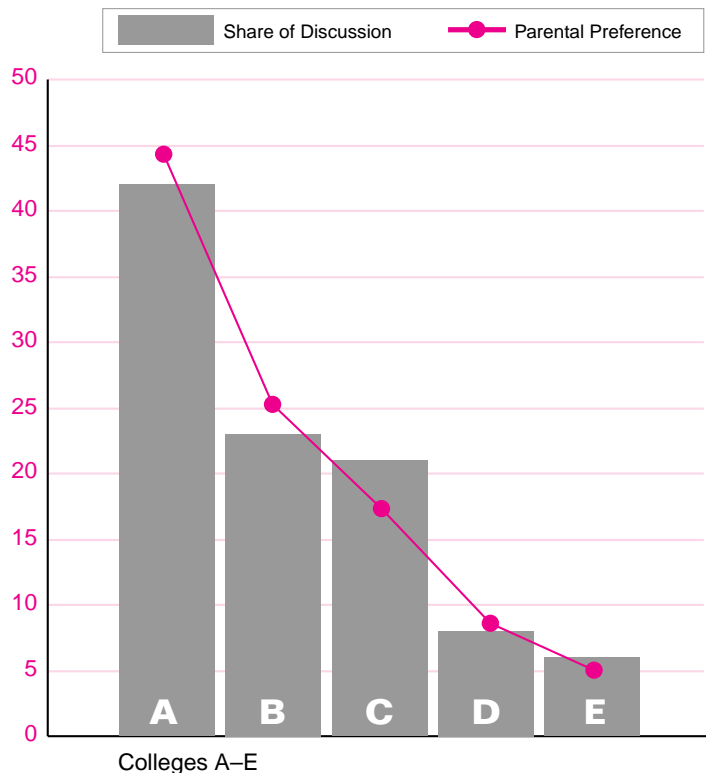
## Developing Your Measurement Program

**First** and foremost, as you develop your measurement program, be sure to measure against objectives. Measurement means nothing unless the results are compared against goals and objectives set at the beginning of a campaign. Moreover, communications goals must flow directly out of organizational goals to achieve lasting results. The PRSA accreditation program provides excellent training on how to write PR campaigns that link directly with organizational goals and how to measure before, during and after a campaign is finished.

**Second**, to assess the effectiveness of your media coverage, you need to ask questions such as: Were your press releases picked up by publications likely to be seen by your target audience? Did the stories communicate key message points? Were the stories favorable in tone? Were they in "high" or "low" value publications? If you can't answer these questions, it's hard to judge whether your media coverage is likely to affect outcomes.

Judy Iannaccone, director of communications for the Rancho Santiago Community College District, who uses an automated evaluation tool, says the impact of analyzing clips by slant has helped management understand the impact of negative news. "A recent experience with some negative news proved that management needed media training. As a result, they bought into a substantial training program, which never would have happened without the scientific analysis," says Iannaccone.

## Parental Preference for Colleges



A study by PRtrak/Surveillance Data shows a direct correlation between a college's share of discussion (favorable media coverage) and college preferences among parents of potential college students.

Susan Grebner, PR coordinator for Illinois Central College, adds, “Our measurement program has helped us know when one media call is more important than another in terms of the value, reach and opportunity. We now take better advantage of these to include our message points, which impact objectives.”

**Third**, there are now a number of great measurement software and data programs on the market to help you. They vary greatly in functionality and price, but all are worth checking out:

[www.vocus.com](http://www.vocus.com)

[www.burrelles.com](http://www.burrelles.com)

[www.BIZ360.com](http://www.BIZ360.com)

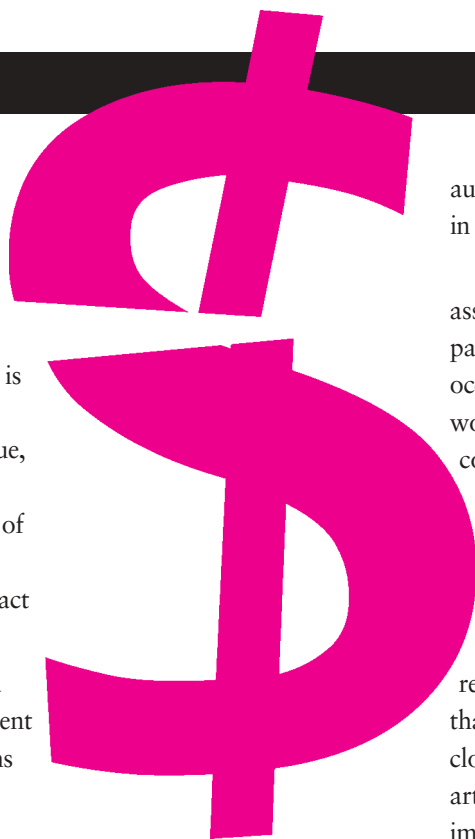
[www.mediamap.com](http://www.mediamap.com)

[www.prtrak.com](http://www.prtrak.com)

## Pros and Cons of Various Measurement Tools

Not every media measurement tool is made equal. Some are easy to use but don't provide enough information. The Institute for Public Relations Commission on Measurement recommends a combination of measures for the best overall view:

**Article counts:** This involves counting the number of media placements or mentions. It's a fast and easy measurement method, but it provides no information about



## A gut feeling isn't going to convince top administrators that your budget should be increased or maintained.

article size, slant, audience, messages and so on.

**Audience impressions:** This assesses potential reach of a story placement, typically using circulation or readership figures for print, “gross impressions” for broadcast, and “average daily visits” for Web sites. Used widely in marketing, it assumes every member of the media

audience read or saw the story in question.

**Media value:** This assesses the market value of the particular space or time occupied by a story, in other words, how much it would cost to purchase that story in that particular medium.

Unlike the methods above, media value can help reflect the “perceived value” of a media source to deliver results. Research also shows that media value correlates closer with outcomes than article counts or audience impressions. The down side? The old way of using “ad value” implied a direct comparison between the effectiveness of ads versus editorial. Also, users of media value must subtract negative coverage from positive and take credit only for the portion of a story “owned” by their organizations.

**Publicity value and multiplier:** This multiplies media value by an arbitrary figure to account for the additional third-party “credibility” of editorial over advertising. This multiplier can help PR people give fuller credit to their media placements. However, there is great disagreement among PR researchers as to the validity of this practice, so if you use one, be sure to disclose your multiplier to management.

**Content analysis:** This assesses message-point conveyance, slant, prominence

and story position. This method establishes the overall *meaning* of the placement and whether or not it meets the organization's objectives. However, it's quite subjective and time-consuming.

**Share of discussion:** This focuses on the quantity and quality of your coverage compared to your competitors. Share of discussion correlates closer with business outcomes than any other metric. (See *chart on Page 6.*)



## The Bottom Line

Because it has been so difficult to prove the value of public relations up until now, many managers have never understood it. With new metrics that prove the power of positive editorial coverage on business outcomes, it's easier for PR people to show their results, receive more attention, enjoy bigger budgets and share a place at the management table. 📈

Angela Jeffrey, APR, is a 20-year PR professional with national awards from PRSA and IABC. She is currently vice president of the PRtrak division of Surveillance Data, Inc. Visit PRtrak's Web site at [www.prtrak.com](http://www.prtrak.com) for free white papers on *A Primer: Measuring Media Coverage Effectively* and *It Works: Correlating Outputs to Outcomes*.