

## In Crisis PR the Best Measurement May Be No Measurement

As we know, without the proper context and narrative, numbers can lie. In addition, some things PR people do are difficult or perhaps impossible to measure in a standard way.

For example, how do you measure the value of a PR pro keeping a disturbing story about the brand from making it into the news

cycle? As Eden Gillott Bowe and Roger Gillott of Gillott Communications write, “the calculus used to measure success in crisis and reputation management is different than it is for PR professionals whose goal is to get stories about clients into the media. These objectives not only require different skill-sets, they demand different mind-sets.”



As part of those skill-sets and mind-sets, they recommend doing the following when you find yourself in a situation where a reporter contacts you possessing information that potentially could hurt your brand:

- **Job one: Get back to the reporter promptly.** When you tell a reporter, “let me check. I’ll get back to you,” make sure you also ask when the journalist’s drop-dead is. Usually, reporters will say it’s earlier than it really is. Regardless, respect the clock and deliver on your promise. Understanding reporters “means you know what they really need when they need it.
- **Job two: Convince the journalist that it wasn’t a competitive story.** And assure him/her that if any other media come snooping, he/she will get the first callback. That deflates the sense of urgency. As the reporter doesn’t feel compelled to file a story immediately to protect a scoop, you have time to develop a more thorough strategy to defuse the issue.

When following these two basic principles, the Gillotts advocate that PR pros possess the following traits to take control of a crisis and stay ahead of the curve when measuring their work:

- **Be the calmest in the room, no matter how dire the situation:** When others are frantic, the PR pro keeps his/her emotions in check. This is the only way to keep control of a story.
- **Realize that "keeping one’s head down" doesn’t work:** If you don’t tell your story, the other side will tell it for you—and you won’t like the way it turns out.
- **Be calculating and analytical:** You barter daily with journalists. You give them what they need, to get what you want. That’s your stock-in-trade. You know in

your gut, at every moment, the precise value of what's being exchanged. So never give up too much.

- **Adhere to two fundamental rules:**

1. The best time to do damage control is before damage occurs.
2. Whenever you deal with the media, you must get it right the first time. There are no take-backs or do-overs.

But how exactly do you measure, in this case, how many stories *didn't* get published? Are there numbers you can bring to your boss or client proving the value of your efforts to thwart a potential crisis?

In the end, the Gillotts conclude, brands and organizations “really don't care about PR processes and logistics. Usually [they don't] care or understand what PR is doing.”

All they care about, according to the Gillotts, is: Did you make my problem go away?

Sometimes that's the only metric that matters.

*The content for this article was adapted from PR News' [Book of Measurement, Vol. 9](#), which is available in digital and print formats.*

Follow Seth: [@skarenstein](#)