



## **Press Release Newswires – A Circulation Without a Readership?**



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**Introduction**

The Internet has revolutionised the way that news is gathered, transmitted and consumed; and it has naturally had an enormous effect on the way that public relations is practised.

Experienced public relations officers (PROs) can still remember the days when press releases were typed or printed on paper and then couriered straight to journalists’ desks, where they joined a mountain of unread foolscap. Today, however, a news release can be disseminated digitally to the widest possible audience, instantaneously and at negligible cost. With a little luck, this release will reach the recipient’s inbox, rather than their spam folder, where it will lie along with the hundreds of other electronic news releases that the journalist received that day; most likely unnoticed, unread and unsuccessful.

But there is another channel for news releases, one that represents a new interpretation of a very old medium – the newswire. This quaint term reflects the then-breathtaking technology that powered that medium, and which caused a seismic shift in newsgathering: the

electric telegraph. A history of the telegraph and nineteenth century newsgathering falls outside the ambit of this report; however, the development of the pioneering wire services is important in understanding how they evolved and influenced the PR news services that this report intends to investigate.

The great pioneering wire services such as Reuters used the new electric telegraph (and, incidentally, homing pigeons) to transmit news across the globe to local bureaux, where it would be sold to newspapers whose journalists would write it up for an increasingly aware and informed public.

Further advances in technology – the telephone, telex, facsimile, satellite communications and, finally, the Internet – did little to alter the basic business model of these news services. The newswires’ trained journalists gathered news on the ground, which was then sold at a profit to other news organisations.

But the emergence of public relations as a distinct profession created a new opportunity to make money from news. This new channel took the form of press release newswires: services whereby public

relations actors could submit, for a fee, press releases which would then be sent to subscribing news organisations. These newswires are often comparatively venerable organisations: one of the oldest, PR Newswire, is more than half a century old.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in a Web-enabled world, the effect of these press release services is, in theory, phenomenal. They can harness the power of the Internet to give their PR clients hitherto undreamt-of reach across the barely-conceivable billions of web pages to which the world has access.

Services such as PR Newswire, SourceWire and PRWeb are, arguably, a new medium in themselves; at the very least, they are a new channel for PROs to disseminate their clients’ news to journalists. Taking a Panglossian view, everybody benefits: the PR newswires earn a cut from each transaction; PR professionals reach the widest possible number of journalists and, by extension, publics; while content-hungry journalists assuage the ire of editors who demand a never-ending stream of stories for online, print and broadcast editions.



In reality, life is rarely so accommodating. Putting a release on such services is no guarantee that anyone will read it; and even if it is picked up by media titles, this does not automatically mean that such coverage is useful. Placing a release on a wire may bring a deluge of Google alerts into your inbox if you've set up a search term, but Google does not discriminate between valuable and irrelevant coverage. The Web, with its plethora of outlets providing "news content", can give a false impression of how successful a news release has been in achieving coverage. These days, there are a multitude of sites that pull news content from disparate sources, including PR newswires, as a means of providing their readers with new content or, one might cynically say, of improving their search engine optimisation (SEO). How is one to judge what constitutes valuable

editorial coverage that is read by an organisation's publics and, one hopes, to influence them?

The aim of this report is twofold: to investigate the utility of press release services; and to attempt to establish a definition of what constitutes coverage. To this end, this research will:

- review the existing literature to examine the current debate on evaluation and coverage, and to compare different evaluation models;
- conduct surveys of PR professionals to establish their attitudes towards online press release services and to gauge their opinion of the value of coverage in various types of media, including PR newswires;
- interview representatives of three industry newswires to enable

them to make the case for their own efficacy; and

- garner the views of the UK's main PR industry bodies.

One final question must be addressed: is too much attention being given to the humble press release, especially when the current debate on evaluation centres on measuring the effect of public relations, rather than just mere output?

The answer must be a resounding 'no'. In the words of Fraser P.

Seitel: "There is no better, clearer, more persuasive way to announce news."<sup>ii</sup> Press releases remain the bread and butter of day-to-day PR activity: witness the continued success of the very news release services this report investigates.



## Literature review and critique

The debate about evaluation in public relations is well-trodden yet still unresolved. Two decades ago, John Pavlik observed that: “Measuring the effectiveness of PR efforts has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail.”<sup>iii</sup> In the years since Pavlik wrote this, myriad PR academics have weighed into the argument on evaluation and coverage. In 2003, McCoy and Hargie wrote: “Probably the most common words in PR in the last ten years has been evaluation and accountability.”<sup>iv</sup> This was more than half a decade ago, yet still the debate rages.

When it comes to establishing a definition of what constitutes valuable coverage, the majority of the literature is quite unsatisfactory. What comes across is a certain coyness, if not outright disdain, for the idea of measuring PR output; instead, most of the literature focuses on evaluating the direct effects of public relations programmes.

This is laudable but, as argued above, the press release is a vital tool for the day-to-day business of

PR. Gaining coverage in target media may not immediately achieve an organisation’s goals, but it is surely an important consideration for achieving cognitive (and possibly affective) results among its publics. All PR plans should involve evaluation of output as well as outcome. Why then is there such a paucity of scholarship on evaluating output, and no agreed definition of “coverage”?

What is clear throughout the literature is the culpability of our industry when it comes to taking evaluation seriously. As Fairchild points out: “Research is a constant reminder that...PR practitioners have failed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the services they provide.”<sup>v</sup> And it is not just fusty, out-of-touch academics who make these claims – it is a truth that has long been acknowledged by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) itself and which, to the organisations’ credit, it has attempted to combat. In 1999 the IPR (now the CIPR) brought out the first edition of *The Public Relations Research and Evaluation Toolkit*, as part of its campaign to set a standard of 10 per cent of PR budgets spent on evaluation.<sup>vi</sup>

What is *not* clear is where the evaluation of coverage comes in measuring PR effectiveness. Many writers refer to Macnamara’s “pyramid model” of PR research. This model measures various levels of a PR campaign, from inputs to outcomes. Interestingly, Macnamara neglects (intentionally or not) explicitly to evaluate different types of media coverage. Instead, he skirts around the issue by providing stages for measuring the number of messages sent; the number who received messages; how many messages make it into the media; and the number and type of messages reaching target audiences.<sup>vii</sup> As far as it goes, Macnamara’s model is a useful guide to different evaluation criteria, yet it is focused on the number of messages sent and the number received; ignoring *how* these messages reach publics.

The model in the multi-authored *Effective Public Relations* separates evaluation into three stages: preparation; implementation; and impact. Although somewhat more modern than Macnamara’s model, it borrows from it heavily and repeats its failings: again, it recommends measuring the number of messages placed, the number who receive



messages and the number who attend.<sup>viii</sup> Both these models are out-of-date because they lack a stage for evaluating the quality and relevance of coverage achieved. Where a release gains coverage is fundamentally important, because of the levels of trust that that outlet engenders in its consumers.

Perhaps we should be unsurprised by this failure. These models were devised either before the Web transformed the media landscape (Macnamara) or on the cusp of this great technological change (Cutlip *et al.*). Before the Web, releases that were published would be almost guaranteed to reach relevant readerships. This is because a release would be ‘processed’ by a proper, trained journalist, who would assess its relevance to the publication’s audience. Now, however, the sheer number of websites that contain “news” content means that one’s press release could potentially appear on many of the billions of pages, yet could be read or trusted by no-one. That is why we need new criteria for evaluating coverage.

This view is not universally shared. In his book *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, David Scott

opines that “...the best way to publish news releases so they are seen by your buyers is to simultaneously post a release on your own website and send it to one of the news release wires”.<sup>ix</sup> The advantage, says Scott, is that the release goes straight to Google, Yahoo!, AOL and other search engines, whence it will be picked up by hundreds of different websites. Whenever someone does an Internet search using the keywords contained in your release, they are likely to find you.

Scott’s viewpoint is debunked by Drew Kerr in a 2009 article entitled: *The Real ROI of the Press Release*. Kerr accepts that press release services can boost companies’ search engine rankings and can help to improve their visibility online; he warns, however, that just because a release is ubiquitous on the web, that does not mean that it has been successful. Contrary to Scott, Kerr questions the utility of PR newswires, dubbing their use ‘the shotgun approach’.<sup>x</sup>

The problem with the shotgun approach is not the amount of “coverage” that is achieved; it is where that coverage occurs. Kerr illustrates his point with the

examples of a publicist’s travel destination announcement which turned up on soap opera discussion boards, and a book promoter who found her marketing release on the Needle & Handicrafts website. While Kerr points out that the promise of improved search engine rankings is illusory; he also highlights the fundamental flaw in Scott’s paean to newswires and search engine rankings: “On the Web, Google searchers are looking for credibility in the form of third-party reviews and recommendations, not a long list of identical press releases.”<sup>xi</sup>

Kerr has identified the crux of the issue. What separates public relations and advertising, and what gives PR its value, is the third-party recommendation that it brings in the form of coverage in trusted and valued news sources. If nothing else, this shows how important it is to evaluate the flood of “coverage” that PR newswires can bring.

Given this, it is difficult to explain the widespread aversion in the available literature to evaluating coverage. According to Kitchen, rating different types of coverage and making judgements on perceived value, “...fails as an



objective measure because it cannot demonstrate the requirements for validity and reliability”.<sup>xii</sup> Kitchen is right as far as evaluating the *results* of a media relations campaign. But it seems folly not to monitor and evaluate media coverage, especially as this enables the client or organisation to judge the success of its campaign in the short term. This is something Kitchen himself acknowledges: “Used properly [coverage reports] are important elements of program implementation...care must be taken to separate the *delivered audience* from the *effective audience*.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Others take a less scientific view. “The goal of the press release is to get press,” thunders PR academic Shel Holtz. “Not coverage in blogs...if the press release does its job, people will read about it in the press and then talk about it [elsewhere].”<sup>xiv</sup> The same author also gives a rudimentary rule of thumb for evaluation: “You can measure the impact of your online efforts by determining how much of your Internet-based materials find their way into editorial coverage.”<sup>xv</sup> Unfortunately, Holtz neglects to define what constitutes editorial coverage.

Some writers come close to defining “valuable coverage”. In his Public Relations Yardstick model, Lindemann says that output can be evaluated by judging whether the target audience has received key messages.<sup>xvi</sup> Kitchen, meanwhile, shows how Macnamara’s separation of outputs and results enables a news release to be evaluated in terms of quality, readability and timeliness – but not as to whether a communications effect has been achieved.<sup>xvii</sup> Reeves’ model, meanwhile, asks “Who is affected?”<sup>xviii</sup> without asking “How are they affected.” With these writers, concerned above all else with a release’s *effect*, the question of where it achieves coverage is left hanging.

The person who comes closest to establishing a definition of coverage is Anne Gregory. Coverage, she says, is how news releases are used “...by a third party who is a channel or opinion former to the target public”.<sup>xix</sup> This elegant description captures perfectly the key elements of coverage: third party endorsement from a media outlet that reaches one’s key publics.

According to Tom Forenski, news releases need to move away from

being “...written by committees, edited by lawyers, and then sent out at great expense...to reach the digital and physical trash bins of tens of thousands of journalists”.<sup>xx</sup> If news releases are to reach their targets, and if online press release services are to be evaluated, a commonly-accepted set of criteria for evaluating coverage needs to be established. This research paper investigates how press release services are perceived by PROs; examines the results that such services claim to achieve; and seeks to establish the PR profession’s opinion on what constitutes coverage.



## Viewpoint: The press release distribution services

Over the course of October 2009, interviews were conducted with three of the most popular press release distribution services. Details of the interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

First, we will examine PR Newswire which, its own publicity material avows, is the best newswire for media pick-up frequency. PR Newswire press releases are picked up 55 per cent of the time, compared to 43 per cent from its next competitor, and 38 per cent for Business Wire.<sup>xxi</sup>

Asked to define “the news media”, a member of PR Newswire’s sales team said:

“We define the news media as print press, such as the broadsheets and tabloids; regional newspapers; news websites; online news databases etc. We feed through to all the news aggregators including Lexis Nexis and Factiva; news sites such as the Wall Street Journal and FT.com; equity terminals such as Reuters and Bloomberg; however we also attach

social bookmarks to each release to make them ‘blogger friendly’ to people on Facebook and Twitter. They are all equally valuable as our clients have different needs about whom they want to target.”

PR Newswire does not grade the type of coverage that they achieve. This, they say, is because their clients decide on what they believe to be a success, with every client having different needs: some prefer print, while others are more focused on online media.

The firm has a reporting system which gives clients an idea of the return on investment (ROI) achieved, though they made clear that PR Newswire is not an evaluation agency. They do, however, list a selection of websites that have taken clients’ content, as well as media access reports, showing which journalists have signed up to receive alerts from the company – these report by type, industry, geography and location.

Asked to define editorial coverage, we were told: “We define editorial coverage on where a release is received by an editor or journalist and they have written about it (either

in print or online) or whether an online blogger has commented on it and it could have generated coverage through bloggers or Twitter.”

SourceWire’s representative also pointed out that different organisations have different needs. “What’s valuable to one client isn’t necessarily valuable to another,” he said. “Obviously, different organisations are going to have different media targets – they’re also going to have different expectations as to the amount of coverage they receive, and whether it appears in the national or trade press.”

SourceWire was the most forthcoming of the newswire interviewees on the subject of grading coverage. “Of course, we’re aware of news aggregator and ‘scraper’ sites that pull in news releases from services like ours. You would have to question the value of [such coverage].”

When asked whether coverage required editorial input, he replied: “Real people produce real content. It’s people that produce good compelling content. Anyone can get indexed by Google without too



much effort. That's great for SEO purposes, but I personally place a premium on well-written editorial content, written by a proper journalist at a recognised media outlet. Whether it's a national or trade story, you're always going to have more trust in The Times or Computer Weekly rather than some random site."

Newswires, he said, should be seen as complementary to the traditional technique of targeting journalists directly and selling-in a story by phone.

"Our clients treat the wire as a supplement to their media relations activity. They'll still hit the phones themselves to do a traditional sell-in to their core media, but they often take advantage of the *secondary benefit* [emphasis added] that our service brings. Some use it purely with the aim of generating online coverage and embedded links."

The final newswire contacted, Business Wire, seemed to contradict

PR Newswire's claim to be the leading service for media pick-up. Rather than the 38 per cent quoted by PR Newswire (see above), Business Wire's representative claimed that 100 per cent of press releases result in placements.

Then again, Business Wire admitted a more inclusive view of the media than did SourceWire. The former's definition of the "news media" included sites such as Moreover and Optical Keyhole, alongside Reuters, AOL and MSN. The first two titles mentioned are, respectively, a self-confessed content aggregation website; and a publisher of telecommunications newsletters.<sup>xxii</sup>  
<sup>xxiii</sup>

It is interesting that, unlike the other two firms interviewed, Business Wire's representative did not once mention a national print or broadcast outlet as an example of the "news media". He did point out, however, that Business Wire conducts polls of the most important trade sites to sample groups of clients to ensure

that they keep on top of the most important media in their sectors.

Business Wire gave perhaps the most interesting definition of editorial coverage. "It's an instance when the copy in a press release has been re-written, adapted or selected for publishing posting by a human being," he said.

The responses from the newswires were generally encouraging. They showed a good appreciation of the needs and wants of different clients, and revealed that they made a distinction between more and less valuable coverage – and were committed to maximising the former.

Having examined the opinions of the news wires themselves, we must now turn our attention to their clients – and our colleagues – in the public relations industry, to judge their opinions on news wires and to garner their views on what constitutes editorial coverage.



## **Viewpoint: The public relations industry**

Between October 2009 and February 2010, public relations professionals from a wide variety of organisations and consultancies were invited to take part in an online poll to establish their opinions of newswires, and their definition of editorial coverage. Full details of the poll, including charts, graphs and tables, can be viewed in the first appendix.

The first task was to find what proportion of respondents do, in fact, use press release distribution services. More than a quarter (27.9 per cent) said that they did not use such services. Of the newswires cited by the respondents who do use them, PR Newswire was by far the most popular, with more than 202 respondents (37.3 per cent of the total) saying they used the service. Business Wire came second, cited by a quarter of respondents (24.7 per cent). Other commonly-cited services included Market Wire, PR Web, Eurekalert and Newswise.

The press release wires will doubtlessly be encouraged to see that almost three quarters of PR professionals use at least one such

service. But the next question, which asked how often these services yielded coverage, hardly revealed a huge vote of confidence in press release newswires. Although 122 respondents (30.5 per cent) claimed that they gain coverage “all the time”, more than two fifths of all respondents (41.8 per cent) said that these services gained coverage only “from time to time”. More surprisingly, almost one in five (18.3 per cent) said that these services “very rarely” or “never” get coverage. Finally, nearly one in ten (9.8 per cent) said that they only used these services for search engine optimisation (SEO) purposes.

These results paint a mixed picture of how these services are perceived by the PR industry. While almost a third are confident that they always generate coverage, the majority view is that they do not guarantee coverage; meanwhile a significant minority see little value, in terms of the coverage they generate, from these services – beyond boosting their organisation in search engine rankings. This raises the question of whether paying to submit a press release to a newswire is a cost-effective use of resources, cash or time taken to achieve this end.

When asked if some coverage is more valuable than others, the answer was almost unanimous. More than nine tenths (90.7 per cent) agreed that some coverage was indeed more valuable than others, while only 16 respondents (3.6 per cent) disagreed, and just 25 people (5.7 per cent) said they were unsure.

The next question was open, and invited PR professionals to state how they assess the value of coverage. The breadth of responses was eye-opening, ranging from the enlightening to the banal. Every answer is listed in the first appendix, but it is worth noting some of the more interesting responses.

A large number of the responses made reference to whether a target audience was reached, echoing Anne Gregory’s definition of a publication that’s “a channel or an opinion former to the target public”. This was expressed in several different ways and words, including “quality of publication”; “reach”; “core media”; and “relevance”.

Examples include: “Readership and circulation figures: if it’s among the top media for the target group we



wanted to reach”; “Depending on the credibility of the eyes of our key stakeholders”; and “I rank coverage from 1 – 10 based on outlet tier and inclusion of client quotes or products. Release pickup always gets a 1 to account for SEO value, but not to count as “real” coverage”. One respondent simply put: “Has the right message reached the right audience(s)?”.

The successful placement of key messages was another common theme for defining coverage, as was the size and reach of the news outlet, and whether the coverage was positive or negative in tone. Interestingly, a few respondents judged “coverage” on whether there had been editorial input.

It is instructive to note that, in spite of the current debate on this type of evaluation, there was little mention of advertising value equivalent (AVE), with only seven of the 380 who answered this question mentioning it. Of those, one alluded to AVE as “a nonsense”.

Far more numerous than mentions of AVE were references to the importance of setting prior objectives with clients about the expected results from media relations activity,

and agreeing what constitutes valuable coverage. This is especially significant in regard to the next question in the poll, which asked if PR professionals distinguished between more and less valuable coverage when reporting to clients.

To their credit, a large majority (78.3 per cent) of those polled said that they explicitly state to their clients that some items of coverage is worth more than others. Yet this contrasts with the number who themselves recognised coverage as having varying values. In fact, some 77 respondents – almost 14 per cent of the total polled – said that they recognised different values of coverage, yet didn’t make this clear to clients or superiors.

These 77 are not necessarily acting unethically, because we don’t know what forms of reporting have been agreed between PR and client, still less what coverage reports they provide. For example, they may automatically sift out worthless coverage, and only report back examples of valuable coverage, such as that which appears in a key media title read by the target audience.

This highlights the issue to which many respondents referred in

question four: that it’s vital to set objectives and realistic expectations of coverage with clients or superiors before activity begins. This must include a definition, or definitions, of what constitutes valuable coverage. In many cases, coverage in a local media outlet or trade journal is as valuable as, or preferable to, national coverage, since it will reach a bigger or more desirable *target* audience.

Question six asked respondents to grade different types of coverage, ranging from a press release being placed in full in target media, to appearing on a news aggregator site. The most noteworthy result was that editorial input was seen to add value to a news release. Asked to rate various outcomes on a value scale of one (lowest value) to six (highest), almost three fifths (59.4 per cent) gave the highest rating to: “Press release used to develop an article in core media, but with editorial input”. This compares to just over two fifths (41.3 per cent) who gave the maximum value to “Press release and messages placed in full in core media” (see Table 1 below).



<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>AVERAGE VALUE</b>
Press release used to develop an article in core media, but with editorial influence (e.g. re-written by journalist)	5.39
Press release and messages placed in full in core media	4.86
Press release triggers interviews in core media but not used	4.07
Press release and messages placed in full in non-core publications	3.39
Press release appearing on an online news aggregator site	3.21
Press release appearing on electronic press release distribution services	2.94

*Table 1*

On average, respondents gave the lowest value to appearing on a press release distribution site. Asked to rate this outcome on a scale of one to six, it averaged a rating of just 2.94 – the lowest value of any of the outcomes by a significant margin.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, those respondents who said that press release newswires “always” gained them coverage were more positive about the value of appearing on such a site. They gave an average value of 3.27 for appearing on a press release distribution site; furthermore, over a quarter of this group (27.9 per cent) awarded this outcome the two highest values, 5 or 6. Furthermore, almost a third of this group (32.1 per cent) attached the highest value (5

or 6) to appearing on a news aggregator site.

Next, the survey looked at the importance of third party reporting – where a story is reported by an objective, disinterested third party, such as a journalist. An overwhelming majority of respondents (93.5 per cent) said that third party reporting was important to achieving campaign goals – higher even than the proportion who recognised different values of coverage. Yet more than half (53.1 per cent) thought that news aggregator sites fulfilled that rôle. Just under a third (30.9 per cent) thought these sites partly provide some of this third party reporting, and only 7 respondents (1.6 per cent) agreed that they provide the

same level as achieved in other media.

The penultimate question asked respondents if they supported the development of a standard, agreed definition of coverage. This threw up the most mixed responses of the survey. The proportion of those supporting a definition of coverage outweighed those who didn’t by 12 per cent – with 38.3 per cent for a definition and 26.3 per cent against, while 35.4 per cent weren’t sure.

Finally, respondents were asked to define “coverage”. As with the question on assessing the value of coverage, this drew a variety of definitions, ranging from the simple (“A name-check”) to the more detailed: “Your news story appearing in the core media read by



your publics, and subject to some degree of editorial influence, whether it is a re-write, a journalist-written introduction, or comment / editorial opinion.”

What is noticeable is that, for most respondents, the news outlet itself does not make much difference to whether a mention of the organisation in the media is

coverage or not. One PRO summed up the general tone of the responses with: “Any reference, in any publicly-available media, anywhere, to your organisation or what it is doing or saying.” Some, however, stressed the importance of hitting core media, or of reaching target publics.

The survey of PROs seems to show a PR industry with a great awareness of the different value of various types of coverage. Yet it is not just individual PR people and consultancies who are leading the debate on evaluation – foremost in this discussion are the PR trade associations, who must also be given their say.



## Viewpoint: The CIPR & PRCA

It was heartening to read Elizabeth Bowen's reply to the first question put to her, as to the place evaluation of coverage comes in the overall evaluation process. "Measuring the amount of coverage...has an important place in the planning and evaluation process," replied the CIPR's public affairs officer. The benefits of evaluating output are that "...you can identify message geographic or demographic coverage issues in your target audiences and make adjustments to your future activity. You can check ROI and you can compare the value of effectiveness of editorial investment on a message-by-message basis," said Bowen.

On the question of whether press release newswires have a place in media relations, Bowen was concise and to-the-point. "[They're] good if you want to get your message across to as wide an audience as possible, but should not be used if you are trying to target an audience."

Asked whether the proliferation of indiscriminate content on the Web, in the form of news aggregator sites, affected evaluation, Bowen gave a surprisingly forthright reply: "News aggregators are now a vital part of the PR industry. [They are] cheap and easy for clients and allow them to get regular updates of coverage they may not be tracking which will then be evaluated." But does this count as coverage? And what *is* coverage?

"Coverage is the delivery of a company, brand/product key message through the medium of broadcast, newspapers, trade or the internet. It can only be defined as coverage if the brand/product or company name is mentioned."

Finally, Bowen was asked if "coverage" had been adequately defined, and if there were a need for a definition. Curiously, although she explicitly stated that "coverage" had not been adequately defined, she stated that, "I do not think there is a need for a definition of coverage." Nor are there any plans by the CIPR to institute such a definition.

Richard Ellis, PRCA Communications Manager, was very clear that coverage needed to be tied back to business objectives. "Monitoring...coverage gives a good idea of whether you're being successful in getting your message into the channels," he said. "It can be a good indicator."

The Internet had, however, complicated the evaluation process. "It means you have to be aware of more channels, which makes the monitoring job more challenging. But it does give you more channels, and gives a good way to reach more niche groups, e.g. through social media."

Ellis clearly expressed the importance of differentiating between different types of website on which one's story appears. "Before you evaluate coverage, you need to be thinking about whether you should be looking at certain sites at all. You should be deciding what you want to appear on, and only target that," he said. Even so, he continued, it does no harm to appear on random sites.



Press release newswires have their place, argued Ellis, as an extremely efficient way of getting a message out to a wide variety of channels “cheaply and time-effectively”.

But throughout the interview, Ellis stressed that evaluating coverage is useless unless viewed within the

context of achieving campaign goals – greater sales and more web hits, for example: “The real challenge for PROs is setting measurable objectives. Coverage doesn’t matter – it’s results that count.”

Ellis sees no need for a definition of coverage (“We just need to focus on demonstrating the impact that we have on delivering objectives”), but he does have a definition: “That the key messages I need to get to specific stakeholders are being picked up in the media that they engage with.”



## Conclusion

This paper set out with two principal aims: to establish whether public relations newswires were useful tools; and to settle upon a decisive and unimpeachable definition of coverage. Let us address the easier question first.

It is difficult to deny that PR newswires can be useful additions to the public relations toolkit. If they were no use at all, then the success of PR Newswire, Business Wire and the like would represent the most staggeringly successful con-trick in our industry's brief history. Well over half of the PR professionals polled use such services, with the vast majority stating that they regularly achieve coverage (see Appendix 1). If they offered no value at all, we should hardly expect such positive results. And, while we should expect positive arguments from the services themselves, they also gained the unambiguous endorsement of the two PR trade associations.

Yet it is important to qualify these results by exploring the nature of

their utility. They are, as Richard Ellis points out, a cheap and time-efficient tool for maximising the reach of one's messages. If reach and diversity of publications are one's object, then newswires do their job admirably. They are also highly useful if the aim is search engine optimisation. But if their use does not regularly result in valuable coverage – the various elements of which have been described at length in this paper – do press release services risk offering a circulation without a readership?

As the academics, experts and PR professionals cited in this paper have pointed out, reaching the widest audience is no substitute for targeting the *right* audience; and it is here that the honesty of the SourceWire representative should be applauded. He pointed out that many of SourceWire's clients use the service as a secondary benefit, employed in conjunction with a mailout and sell-in, where PRs get on the phone to journalists and engage with them directly.

As was pointed out by each of the newswires, every client has different needs. Some are focused purely on search engine

optimisation; others are more concerned with volume than with targeting. It is difficult if not impossible, on one's own, to match the results that press release distribution services achieve in these areas. But for PROs who wish to reach the right journalist at key media titles, these newswires must be seen as complementary to traditional – and time-consuming – PR activities if they are to achieve this type of coverage.

Which leads us on to the central issue: is it possible to define what constitutes valuable coverage? What *is* clear is the highly subjective nature of PR people's definition of coverage. This can be seen in the wide variety of responses to the survey of PR professionals. Yet, of all the definitions, there was one that kept cropping up which incorporated the same base elements. We encountered it in the literature review, where Anne Gregory gave it voice; it cropped up again in the industry survey, where more than one of the responses contained the same elements; representatives of the newswires mentioned it; and so did Richard Ellis of the PRCA.



It is interesting that the following elements kept rearing their heads, again and again. Editorial coverage means being reported by a third party who is a channel or opinion-former to target publics; it requires editorial input, rather than a verbatim re-posting of a release; and it must include key messages.

But is there a need for a universally-agreed definition of coverage at all? The argument against defining coverage is that to do so is to focus on output – what PR people write and where it appears – when the PR profession needs to focus more clearly on outcome – how campaign objectives are achieved.

But that is to ignore the inherent limits of public relations' effectiveness. Public relations, as with other Marketing Communication (MarComs) disciplines, is ultimately reliant on the product or service which it is promoting. There are some products or services that simply aren't any good; similarly, there are some reputations which are absolutely irredeemable. PR can make people aware of a product, or even try it, but it cannot make them love it. David Ogilvy, the

celebrated "Father of Advertising" may as well have been talking about public relations when he asked: "Can advertising foist an inferior product on the consumer? Bitter experience has taught me that it cannot. On those rare occasions when I have advertised products which consumer tests have found inferior to other products in the same field, the results have been disastrous." One may run an exceptional PR campaign, but it cannot replace deficiencies in the other elements of a successful marketing programme – product, price, place, promotion and packaging.

Furthermore, securing placement in the media is never guaranteed in media relations, unlike in advertising. A news release is always subject to the caprices of news editors and the unforgiving nature of the news agenda. A release which might, on an ordinary news day, gain acres of coverage may get none if it coincides with an exceptional news event. Thus, judging by outcome alone will not always recognise the effort, expertise and creativity that has gone into a media relations campaign.

It is very difficult to deny that positive outcomes – whether it is raising awareness, altering attitudes or changing behaviour – are more important than whether a mere press release gets covered. Yet the first step of many PR programmes is to get key messages into the right channels. Without coverage in the media it's difficult, if not impossible, to achieve those cognitive, affective and conative effects. It is false logic to say that defining coverage detracts from measuring real outcomes, although care must be taken to ensure that coverage is not claimed as an outcome in, and of, itself.

If PR professionals are bound to an agreed definition of coverage, they can prove that they have achieved the first important objective of their programme. With this in place, they can then look at other determinants of success and judge if the messages have been successful in achieving their aim. If they have not, it will not be because they have not reached the target publics.

An agreed definition can do no harm, yet can bring considerable benefits. Public relations, ironically, has one of the worst reputations of any profession. It is



widely acknowledged that the profession has signally failed to provide a rigorous method or structure for reporting its overall effectiveness.

It is the carefully considered belief of Parker, Wayne & Kent, at least, that an agreed definition of coverage can only help to move along the stagnant debate on evaluating public relations' overall effect.

If there should be a standard for what constitutes valuable coverage,

it will need to be agreed by our profession as a whole, after a period of healthy debate. If there is to be a standard definition, it must not be so prescriptive that it endorses only a tiny number of articles in big newspapers; nor can it be too woolly, with no real meaning and offering no real guide to the value of the coverage achieved. This debate lies, we hope, in the near future. Our contribution, beyond conducting the research that underlies this paper, is to offer up our definition of coverage for debate:

*“Valuable editorial coverage depends on appearing in trusted third party media that are channels or opinion-formers to the public being targeted; if there has been editorial input by a journalist; and if key messages and company sources are included.”*

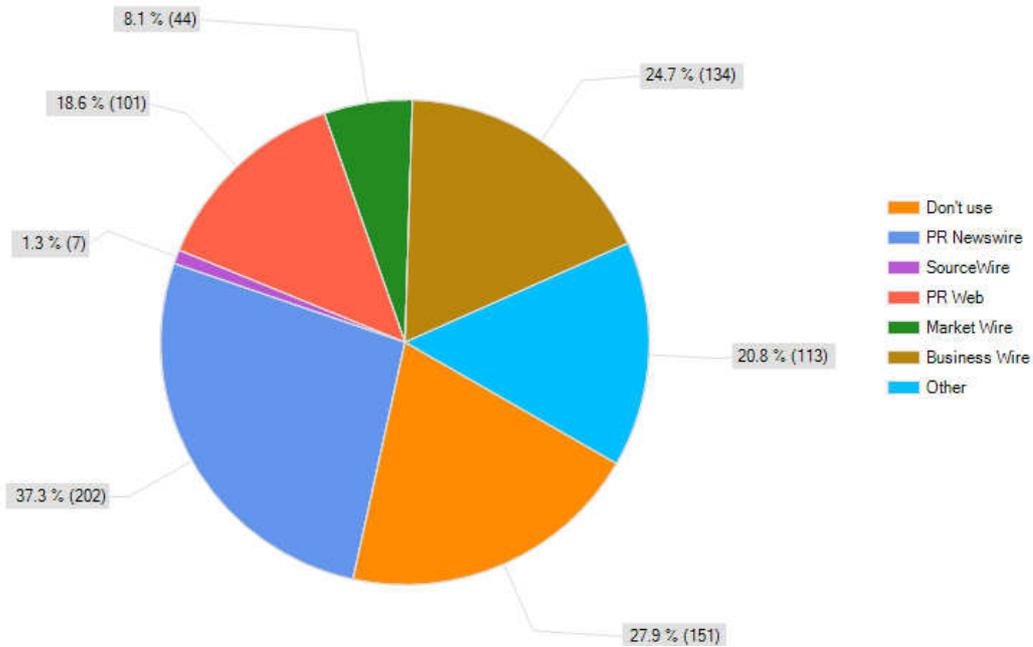
As regards the press release distribution services, if they can regularly achieve this type of coverage, then they can certainly be deemed to offer value for money.



**Appendix 1 – Survey results of public relations professionals**

*Survey results were collected between 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009 and February 16<sup>th</sup> 2010.*

**Fig. 1. Do you use electronic press release distribution services?**



**Fig. 2. Do they get coverage?**

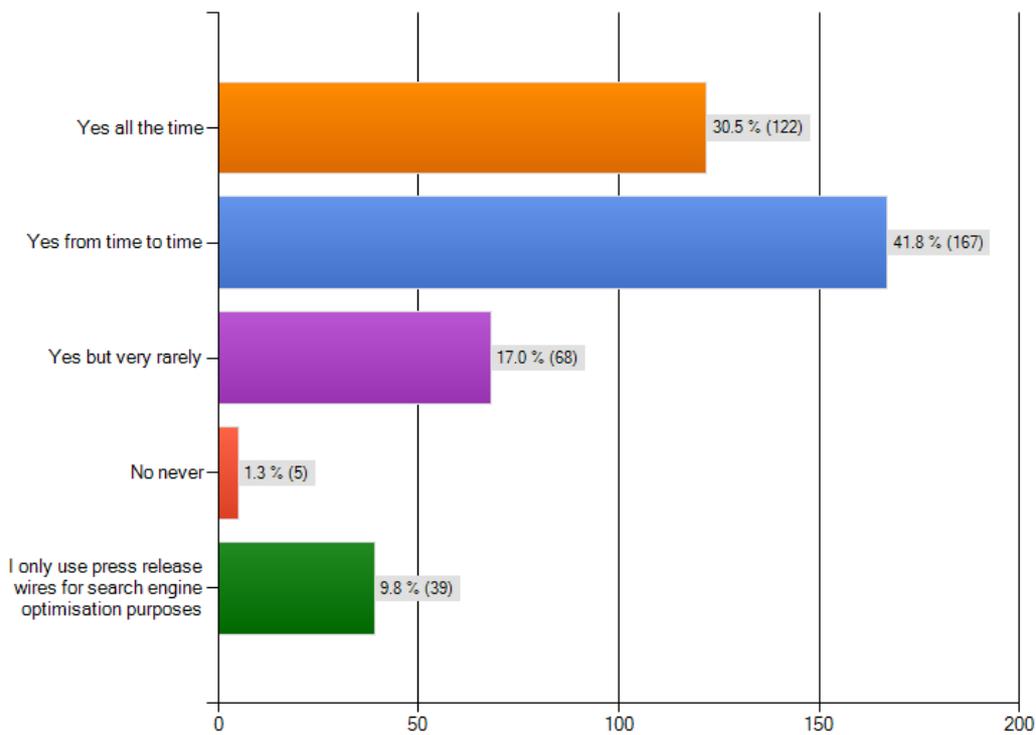




Fig. 3. Do you recognise some coverage as more valuable than other coverage?

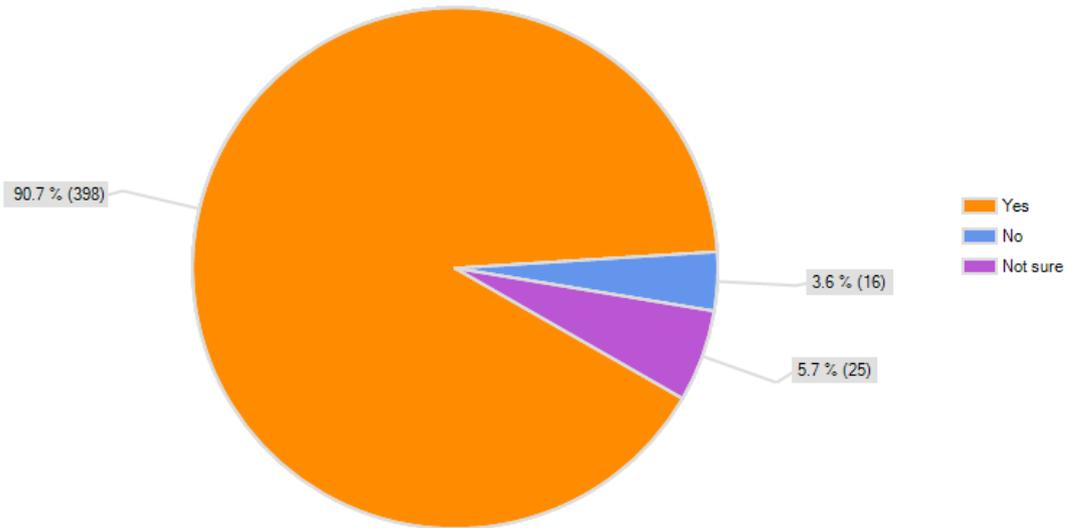


Table 1. If you answered "Yes" to the above, how do assess the value of coverage?

In publications we deem to target key audiences
Physical space in print, quality of portal, regularity of being published, actual response to message
Proprietary metrics calculations done by employer.
If it hits our target audiences
National
Placement
original reporting
If the media is likely to pick it up (more national, stronger statistics)
are these outlets that have relevance to our target audiences?
Clients mostly determine goals and therefore the value
Reputation of publication and/or region, country.
Does it generate leads/sales, visits to a Web site, cast an organization in a favorable light



Audience served by medium + position/prominence of placement
Client goals
when the receivers want to write about the client.
Alignment with Business objectives
The type of publication that picks the story up
ranking of target media in terms of demographics w/our target audience
Degree of reach and appropriateness to target audience
reputation, reach, influence
readership profile
Assessed by marketing department/increased feedback
Readership
Its more valuable to us if someone from the company is quoted and cited as an expert on the topic, in addition we look at the reach/impressions and linkbacks to our online properties
the relevancy of the media outlet where the release is picked up.
Size and region of publication or media outlet
Client feedback and their target audiences
impressions per hit. audience quality per hit
target media outlets and reporters
Coverage in top 5 International outlets DJ, B'berg, Reuters etc
When they generate feature stories on my clients
Depending on relevancy an timing of subject
Reach of media org.
Value is determined by who picks it up, not quantity.
key messages, tone, mentions, placement, audience reach, etc.
Relevance to B-to-B industry
based on my target audience



National Dailies rank higher than Regional Dailies which rank higher than community papers
depth of coverage (more than name mention), outlet (how many reached -- but we don't actually count), likelihood of reaching our most important audiences
If a reporter reprints portions of the press release
quality of links, stories, into online news sites
How many local publications run something based off of a release that was sent out
Coverage from local media is more valuable; the majority of the news releases we send out on the wires are to report financial results or to comply with federal guidelines, so a lot of our hits are stock sites update the news affiliated with our ticker symbol.
trade vs general, top-tier vs local, etc
importance of the media to client objectives
media source, length of coverage
very difficult to do and it depends on the client
On a test public's reactions.
It's all about proven readership of the publishing title - some titles are too niche to make a quantifiable impact on client targets
We target specific publications and rank others generally in priority order
Our own value system
relevance
It is relative to the news release/pitch. Some news releases/pitches are more worthy than others. Sometimes, one line in a blog is cause for celebration because it is a top blog in any given niche (e.g., biomedical, basic science).
market; Web links
Credibility and reach of the publication; tone of coverage
Quality of the outlet, whether they take the release and just paste it somewhere or if someone references it
How well pub reaches our target audience.
profile of media, reach, & correct area of expertise
type of coverage, relevance of outlet to client
What's its likelihood of generating interest leading to income?



circulation, audience, target, not just outcome but results
If I actually worked with a reporter to get coverage
Original story vs. reprint of news release
Audience plus advertising economic value
popularity/circ of the publication; # web results and feed to Google News
Nature of the placement, prominence of the placement
Reach; consumer follow through
Usually the best coverage one can get is a top ranked Webzine as offline media don't usually use the info unless it's a compelling story in informing or entertaining
A press release that has just been "reposted" is not as valuable as a press release that was read and summarized by an editor, blogger, etc. using their own words and style for their specific audience / media.
Reach and circulation of the outlet; reach to target audiences
Target audience readership
overall reach, reach to specific target audiences
sheer vanity
Each client is different with pre-established and agreed upon metrics
how relevant it is to my industry
By the publications that cover it
reach, publicity value
WE HAVE A TARGETED MEDIA LIST.
Location, tone and positive mentions
I don't consider the web sites at TV stations, etc. where most of the coverage lands as having much value. Rarely do the wires generate solid coverage outside of the web.
type of coverabe (positive, negative, on message) & target audience priority
Hate to say this, but ... impressions
There are copy-paste of PRs & articles written based on our stories.
It depends on the client--where it is important for them
coverage in national pubs is the most important



Scope and credibility of the publication/ source
By the publication/web sites amount of readers, subscribers and by evaluating feedback from readers of those sites/publications.
Local stories, expanded feature stories are more valuable than local news briefs
circulation and frequency
size of audience, geographic reach, demographics appropriate to the project
The quality of the media and their demographics
By the pick up of key messages
There is no specific criteria.
Depends on the content
audience reach of media outlet
Depends on the outlet i.e., Forbes.com vs. Earth Times.com
How do you define "coverage" when the wire services have content relationships with the news portals?
Real News
interview generated vs "pick up"
NA
More valuable articles are those where the reporter has taken the release and added to it and customized it for his/her news outlet vs. just reprinting the news release verbatim.
circulation, geography, national importance
prestige and reach of media outlet
Quality of publication in relation to audience(s) and client
larger markets, higher mention
Depends on the audience of the publication or Web site
Coverage in smaller, rural newspapers has less value than large, big-city papers b/c the circulation is much smaller
Primary targets for coverage vary by project, but typically a national outlet will be more valuable to us than a local or trade one. Coverage within the UK is also more valuable to us than international - most of the time! We don't apply any multipliers though



Relevant readership, number of views, respected site
big media outlets
Relevance and audience
audience reached
based on which media post release
Is it carried by well known media outlets or by obscure websites
Clearly, if you're targeting a message to a specific group, it makes sense to target that message to those you know will be interested and reach your targeted audience.
coverage is valuable when it transmits what is important to the company to tell.
publication source
Type of pub and size - visibility - NY Times versus smaller paper; wider read online site than another
if coverage conveys key message or value of the institution
Readership of publications
Coverage in key titles more significant
circulation, reach, TA
quotations from release
depends on the objectives of the campaign
Contains primary message for client
Quality of news outlet
Daily media appropriate to client needs is preferred
Depends on the relevancy of the publication
If it's a publication or outlet that our audience reads.
readership
market rank, pub type, demographic and reach
whether it addresses key messages of the institution
Coverage that reaches a specific target audience is, of course, more valuable than coverage



that does not.
Geographical / publication
How targeted is the pub to the targeted audience.
Reporters / editors contacting
Coverage in outlets which meet our target audience.
Scientific publications
Many Web sites (e.g., CNN.com, Channel 5 of Lubbock, Texas) routinely post PRN releases on web page #99. We don't count those.
outlet recognition, pass-along value, re-Tweeting
Coverage that is more than just a copy of the press release, and printed vs online only, I believe is more valuable
Use a multiplier according to influence
If publication reaches our customers
if it's on let's say Reuters, LA Times.com, etc
Big national outlet or smaller local coverage
My superiors still want print coverage
MRP reports - system in Canada
Size and quality of audience: demogrpahics and psychographics
The coverage spans targeted sites as well as news sites which are not targeted
by the impact of the medium
Categories: mainstreeam national media coverage on both print/air AND website is top of list
Likelihood of reaching specific stakeholders (e.g., investors)
Clients want WSJ NYT Post USA Today, etc. But I assess value based on reach. I recognize those sources as only reaching a very limited population.
credibility of site, number of possible impressions/exposure
We measure the ad equivalency and whether the message is appropriate.
cred of outlet, ad equivalency



Relevant demographic, widespread distribution, opportunity for more pick ups
If a story come out of media relations activities.
outlet, length, topic
# impressions; circulation; first-tier press multiplier; key influencer writer/blogger
Content analysis
Strength and reputation of the web site posting it
prominence of placement
reach, intended audience, readership, influence
I judge the number of hits.
Audience reach, demographic targets, reputation
industry specific and meets certain target audience criteria
outlet that reaches the desired audience and generates measurable results
Whether the outlet is a genuine target for us and valued by client.
stature of the publication in which it appears
I only use newswires for stories that I expect to do well.
Quality and, to a degree, size of audience
Several categories, including size of pubs readership, amount of article/spot featuring client, tone of piece and location within pub or newscast
closeness to audience target and likelihood to generate more media
stories in more prominent or credible sources are worth more than stories placed in a shopper.
Intended audience
Media Value
name of the publication, sizw of the article
the beeter the publication (WSJ, NYTimes, etc) the more value
depends on target audiences
Communicating to "influencers"



more valuable in opinion leading media, both offline and online
rewrites and bylined articles have more weight
Whether or not it reaches and potentially influences the target audience
Stature of outlet
number of hits, quality of pubs
Apparent SEO value
Placement in traditional and online media
Do my clients buyers or gatekeepers read the publication?
Type of media outlet, placement
circulation
If it draws attention to your story in your market
Appropriate trade press
All releases posted on university web site get almost immediate pickup from googlenews; also post many to AAAS EurekAlert and NewsWise news release distribution service. This process invariably results in lots of verbatim pickups of news releases by blogs and topic-focused "news" web sites, but essentially they are just repurposing our news releases -- electronic-scraping by keyword and using our content to draw readers, advertisers, etc... The more elusive and more prized coverage is what we might traditionally have considered a media hit -- ie pick-up by a real reporter or blogger who actually writes something of their own based on the release, or perhaps goes so far as to conduct their own interview with the source. Releases that generate real secondary coverage are becoming much more rare and mass-spamming a news release is not always an effective route to landing these hits.
qualitatively
tone of voice, share, prominence, message
Depends on how positive the story is for my client.
Reporter written vs. auto web pickup
All coverage is on Web. Most valuable: prominent sites, e.g., USA Today, Yahoo Finance
I've used newswires for clients more to "create buzz," real news does get picked up, but pitching and following up is key for coverage.
industry and local coverage vs. broad, web-based
2) third-party coverage with commentary, quality of outlet, outlet target and audience, sentiment



Coverage that includes original journalism is more valuable than straight reprints of press releases
editorial interventions
audience
audience
National print or broadcast media
publication reputation and circulation
If the coverage moves people to take some action
Quality of the outlet as it relates to the story/client's market
Reputation and reach
specific editorial driven content on the release's touchpoints
Unique visits to the release
Depends on the goal of each. In many cases targeted focus is better than national coverage.
Match the demo of decision-maker
getting business press
relevant audiences
Bigger paper, bigger value
Immediacy; length of report; reflecting strategic messages; quoting spokesperson.
The coverage is all online -- Yahoo, Excite, USA Today Web site, etc. Evaluate it on prominence of the Web site.
Some news is bigger and more important than other news, especially for publicly traded companies
profile/credibility of publisher, audience OTCs
if it generates a post on a blog that's relevant to our audience and has readership then it has value
audience impressions; quality of media outlet
Major media is most valuable; to certain clients, so are some trades. Visibility, name recognition, web hits, new customers.
circulation, unique visitors



KEY MESSAGES
Coverage in our key pub list ranks higher.
Priority media per client objectives, on-target messaging in coverage, client is highlighted/key to story angle/prominence in story
Reach of the coverage, influence of the coverage. Tough to measure.
By target audience (or client objective). That is, what is my target audience reading or in which publication did my client want coverage?
Key message playback
Off-line media pick-up is more valuable than online aggregators of wire-distributed releases
Type of publication, online or print
depend on the audience
Target audience of publication/prestige in such a community.
Media Rating Points and ad value
In print and commented pickup (rather than automatic) is most important
size of print or web audience
tone, publication, placement, etc.
Based on readership and in some cases the reputation of the media in question
Whether it addresses our key positive points with a multiplier based on the place of the coverage
If it gets picked up by other news portals & sites
by my target media
sometimes in homepage
Reputation of outlet, relevant to target audience
Posting on a legitimate media website.
Whether or not it gets in front of a key external audience and/or whether or not it influences sales
Internet hits on major media, and wire stories, are more valuable
placement, tone, key messages included, readership
National is better than local



SEO vs. pick up, crisis mgmnt vs. product announcement
SEO in addition to pick-up
Placement, location
whether it reaches their target audience
By the site or portal's relevancy to the client
Importance of medium
readership
Whether it is an editorial article or just a copy of the press release
whether it's a pickup of a PR Newswire story or a story resulting from additional work/interview from reporter
By integrating micro campaigns to show visibility clicks
Size of media outlet. Target audince it reaches.
Coverage in target trades or biz = better
By how the publication reaches my audience and the depth of information given.
popularity of site
Depends on the targeting/relevance of the publication
Major stories in the bigger circulation and viewed media areas.
PR Trak, generation of social conversation via Radian6
Gauge by the relevance of the site the PR is picked up.
Any original, positive stories in relevant media is more valuable than newswire distribution.
The stature of the organization covering the news, the circulation of their news products and reader feedback
Quality of the publication
type of publication, pertinence to my organization
I do not consider reprints of the press release as coverage. Coverage only counts if it is an original story written by a journalist. I'm also currently evaluating how to gauge the value of tweets, etc.
Publication prominence



The publication(s) that picked up the story
qualified readership vs. general
Actual blogs and websites that generate engagement are far more valuable.
If influential writers are reaching the right buyers w/ right message
Significance and impact on client's business or image.
based on scope and reach of the medium
Biggest venue
For those clients that need web optimization, I strongly recommend wire services.
It's probably an issue of circulation. But we don't discount placement in small circulation publications.
targeted publications, key messages, dominance
If the release has a live link to a website, we measure traffic
relevance of site of pick up to customer's market
Who uses release; how it's played
if the publication takes the information, researches further, and rewrites the information into a "feature."
national/global press preferred
Any coverage is good, but mostly I'm looking for optimization
Depends on the issue - but obviously certain pubs/outlets are better if they reach our target market(s).
positive, impressions, audience, targeted, reach
Dumb question
Depends on the audiences I am trying to target.
circulation / readership and online vs print
Dollars generated
Press release reprints vs actual articles
The extent of coverage by targeted media



decide media target list with client via media tracking
FT, BBC, etc count for more
By publication and distribution
Based on type of publication, reach, positioning, message, pictorial inclusion, etc
Readership of the outlet; credibility of the outlet
AVE, Circulation, Audience of the journal, column inches
type of outlet, name check and quotes
quality of publication/media outlet; match with target audience; quality of message
The value is based on the balance and accuracy of the story. Most importantly that positive or accurate messages are within the article.
Quality coverage for example on an event we organised
Publication, influence, size, reach, frequency, +/-
audience/circulation/unique monthly visitors
Correct messaging, no negatives, position in publication
subjectively - the publication, position etc
National broadsheet, TV Radio, trades but it depends on the client needs and their targets
Size, key messages, relevancy of publication, spokesperson quotes
circulation of story, if it has reached our target mkt
The tone of the piece and whether it's gotten across the key messages that were intended
Amount and tonality
Number of people it reaches
Readership and circulation figures; if it's among the top media for the target group we wanted to reach
Where it is covered, when it is covered and the actual content
Message penetration, tone, language splits, geographies, medium etc
The publication/broadcast outlet that featured it and whether that reaches our target populations.
column coverage, page, publication dependent



Target audience reached by the particular media outlet
Based on client objectives
The relevancy of the pub that is picking it up
We do not put a figure on it (eg. AVE which is a nonsense)
Qualitatively, in terms of key messages and number / type of readership / viewers
Whether positive or not.
publication / broadcaster
AVE, target publications
Editorial rather than press release repost, bylined, key audience for client
Editorial rather than press release repost, bylined, key audience for client
External evaluation company, scored according to key messages
readership and both the reputation of the media and the access the it provides to our target market
Scope of pick up, feedback, requests for further information, blog and forum chat around the announcement
Positive/negative; placing; AVE.
Print better than online
Has the right message reached the right audience(s)
Against targets in my comms strategy, and by circulation
National and internatioanl coverage is generally what we are looking for. Though regional very useful for certain releases too.
By target market and key message delivery
Coverage for John charcol is always more succesful in terms of generating interrest from consumers when it is in the quality press ie broadsheets
the higher the readership or greater the viewing/listening figures, the greater the value of placing a story. Also, some news outlets are valued more highly for their prestige in this organisation (Guardian seen as better than The Sun) though I don't agree and think it should be the other way around!
Value set down by clients and their expectations, eg, some are interested in trade press, others interested in national but not regional.



Depending on the credibility of the publication in the eyes of our key stakeholders
Depends whether it is key publication for that specific client
visibility, location, purpose
The key point is whether it accurately reflects the message we are trying to get over. Even if an article is anti, as long as they have reported the story in a balanced way that, in my opinion, is valuable coverage.
Size of article, credit for my institution and quality/audience of the outlet
How many readers the coverage will reach and crucially the coverage must feature the name of the Journal we are doing the PR for, rather than just the author.
Publication, how well it reflects clients goals/messages, proportion of article devoted to the client, how well the article reads
Value depends on title - some publications more influential than others. Also space given to the story and whether it is written positively in your favour. In some campaigns, the value of coverage has also been assessed via impact on sales and/or change of opinion of your target audience (ie via market research)
quality and relevance to client of readership
Whether it is a core title for the client
Wire coverage is usually a replica of your release - not as good as editorial coverage
Column inches and equivalent ad costs
Readership
Impact of the publication - for example, national newspaper. Also, relevance of coverage - for example, if the news piece is about malaria prevention strategies we would like to see coverage in relevant science/health media, African media, etc.
Depends on circulation, authority and target audience
People talk about it
You use your judgement - the seriousness of the media, the topic covered and type of coverage, the readership/listenership/viewership, the nature of the audience likely to read/hear/see it, and so on
circulation and audience
Prominence on the page, quality of messages
In terms of reach, advertising value equivalent, and the messages communicated in the coverage.



Key messages included/positive headline
Published in my clients' target media
More valuable if meets strategic goals - ie on-message, in media that reaches target audiences, positive tone etc
Electronic press release distribution services tend to generate a mass of low-value coverage. There's often little or no added editorial value. Sites simply pick up and post releases. There is value in this but less so in the traditional way. As such, it is hard to accurately assess.
the type of publication in relation to client's target audience
PR newswire is picked up by other electronic services, but this is not necessarily valuable.
Outlets that pick up the news releases
Type of publication
Based on the publication/readership
Electronic & Front Page
I rank coverage from 1-10 based on outlet tier and inclusion of client quotes or products. Release pickup always gets a 1 to account for SEO value, but not to count as "real" coverage.
Readership/Distribution numbers
it's relevance to the audiences I am trying to reach
Importance of the publication picking up
a range of qualitative and quantitative measures
Readership and ad value
Dependent on the reputation of the publication and how valuable the coverage is to the client
I don't
Mainly through opportunities to see, but also by prominence and whether key messages are covered.
Position in paper, tone, headline, use of quotes and pictures
Whether the target audience were reached, and that the press release has had some element of editorial influence from a journalist.
It is in an influential media title targeted, recognised as a target publication in our media plans.



Fig. 4. When reporting to clients or superiors, do you explicitly state that some coverage is more / less valuable than other coverage?

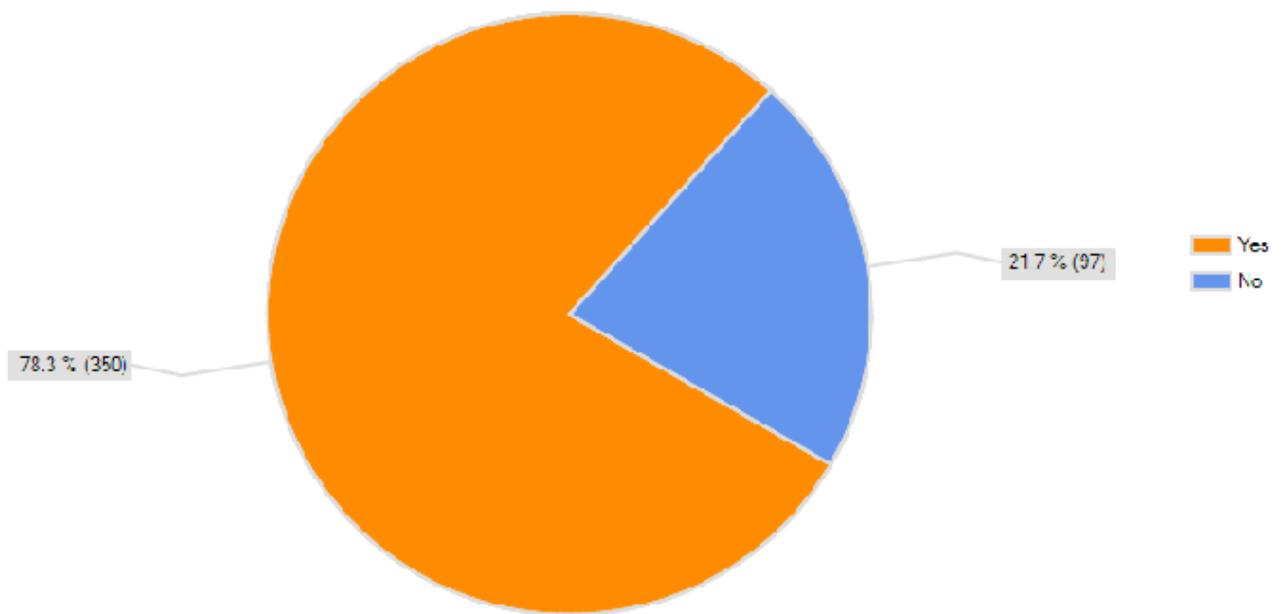




Fig. 5. Place these examples of different formats of coverage in order of value, from most valuable (6) to least valuable (1)

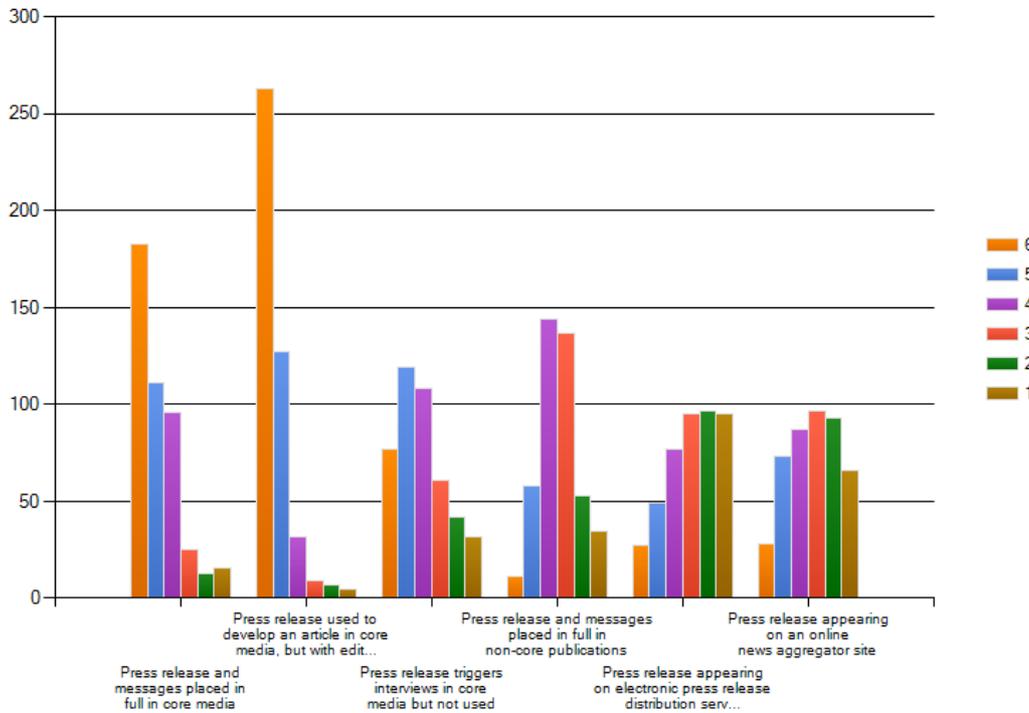


Fig. 6. Do you think that 3<sup>rd</sup> party reporting (i.e. written by a professional journalist or independent blogger) is important to achieving campaign goals?

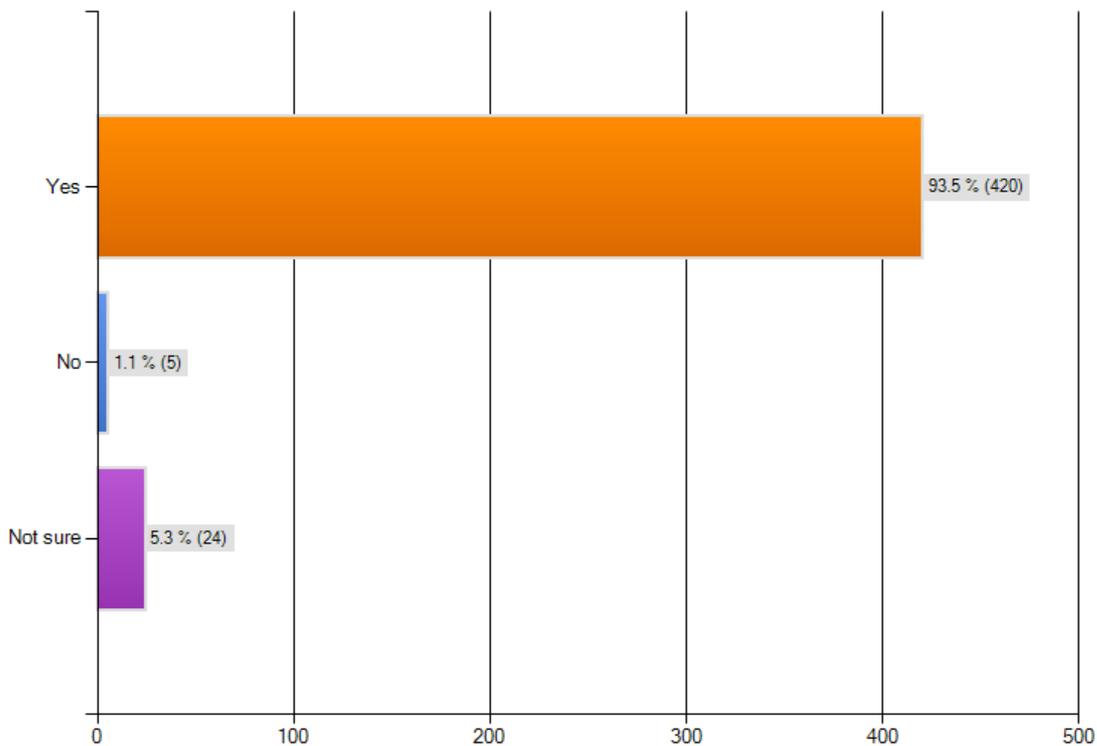




Fig. 7. Do you think that news aggregator sites provide the same 3<sup>rd</sup> party endorsement as that which is achieved in other media?

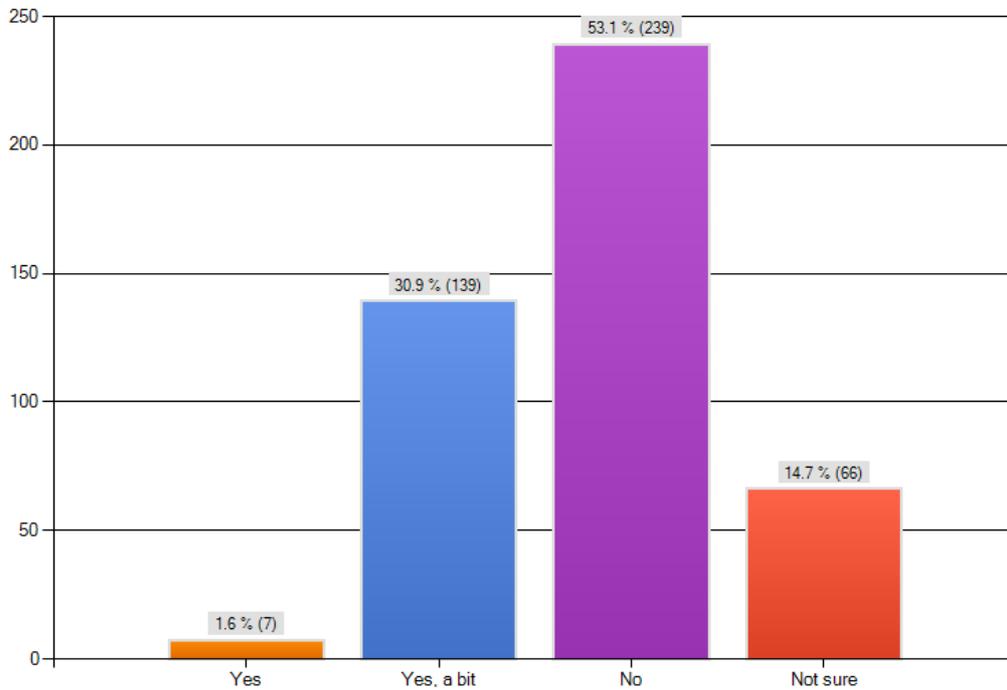


Fig. 8. Do you support the development of a standard, agreed definition of “coverage”?

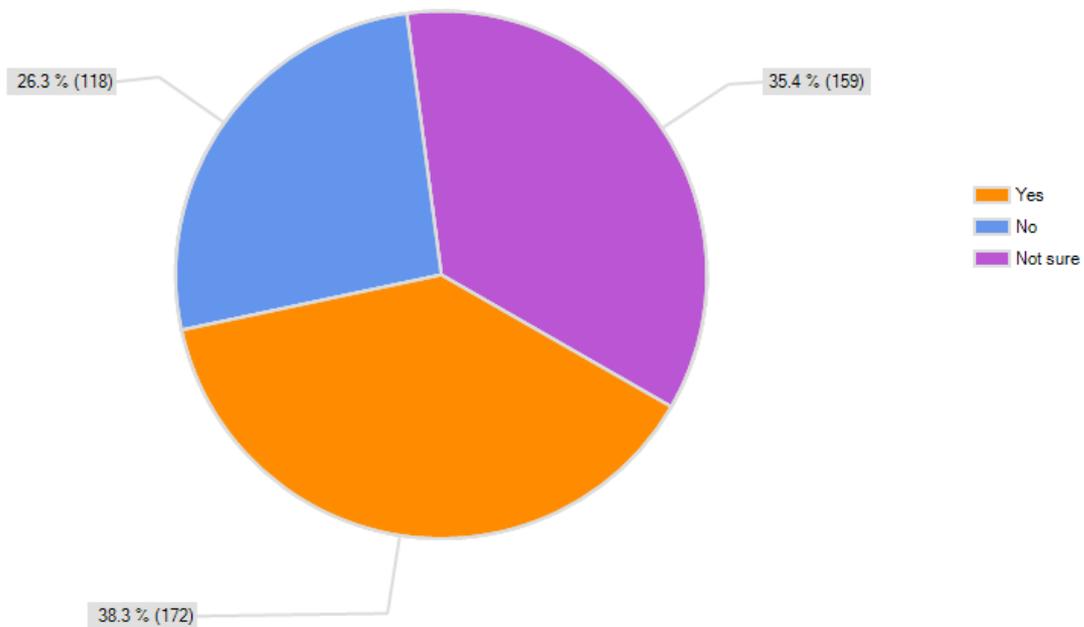




Table 2. How would you define “coverage”?

A bylined published story in the public domain story written by someone independent of the organization I represent.
It differs by client, segment and release topic - too variable
Appearances in media which creates a favourable impression of the client/company and which is either read by target customers of the client or leads target customers of the client to any form of contact e.g. website visit, phone call, recognition at event, etc.
Getting the message into targeted multi-platform media but it's useless unless targeted
Presentation in a venue read by our target audiences
It's all in the eyes of the beholder (the institution)
A release gets a reporter to write a story
Any reporting on clients or comments by clients
Any pick-up is considered coverage
"coverage" needs to be broken down into standard common categories
Coverage begins with mention (aka, the "plug") and then vectors to positive (however defined) to "negative" (also subject to case-by-case definition).
Editorial mention of an organization, key personnel or products
Attention by news media to topic or organization, resulting in some level of publicity
original article or report
it means to me, when a good number media outlets pick up the news item and write about it, for the publication which result in sales for my client.
Story, expert testimonial, mention in larger story, p.r. captured in full
Public awareness
targeted media report on one of our projects, initiatives or people or include our position in reporting on a broader issue
Articles/posts/commentary spanning mainstream media, online (trades, blogs, etc.), news aggregators and social media.
reaching an intended audience
independent editorial
Article(s) placed in prominent place in print/ or mentioned in prominent place in broadcast
earned media



depends on the goals of the campaign -- traffic driving -- then number of places the story appears and links back to the company, and conversion rate; if the goal is brand awareness -- coverage by journalists and bloggers that includes company and quote from company or third party endorsement; SEO -- link backs, ranking on major search engines
prominent mention of organization, product, service etc. in primary media outlets
Included in core/main publications/broadcast/AP
pick up of release or a story in a targeted pub
editorial coverage has great credibility
exposure as a result of PR efforts
replication of press release or independently written articles based on distributed press release, including key messages, in key target publications.
When reporters/editors consider you an expert.
When a writer hears our story/topic and decides to write about it. That means that we have made enough impact for someone to care enough to comment on what we are saying.
Placement of stories from tips, pitches or press releases.
Generally, it's the reproduction of news and information issued by my organization in a recognized media source, either reported on or used entirely in that source.
Whatever gets my message to the buyer.
With so many traditional and social media tools, defining coverage would be difficult. And, for every client it is different. For some, a quick "new business" reference is a win and satisfying. For another, full profiles might not meet expectations. It comes back to the business and whether or not you impacted objectives for success, that's too variable to put a standard to - the exceptions to the rule would outweigh the definition.
not sure
impact (reach) plus qualitative (tone)
articles based on interviews, and some forms of press release pickups, also mentions in articles that talk about the industry or competitors
Getting onto news sites, highly ranked blogs, getting shared on social networks, stories in the press
Stories or mentions in core publications for your market, as well as secondary publications.
A publication covering our news, requesting an interview about a hot industry topic - resulting in attribution
article/broadcast of issue (not re-print of release)
published or broadcast information that mentions the company or organization in a significant way.



any website, print or online publication mentioning client as a link or in an article
message, URL depends on the client
Reaching my target, reaching my goals.
Broadly. The story is written about and/or aired in any medium ....
independant publication
Some PR is still very tactical and has to be - the latest handbag is always going to feature in glossy Vogue. My stance is that good coverage is getting people to talk about your client/brand.
coverage is what overlies the underlying definition
articles that appear that get in front of key constituents
When a media outlet talks/writes about the client -- good or bad -- that's coverage
Desired message appears in a 3rd party outlet
pickups and mentions in both traditional and social media
Coverage now is a como of traditional and social media so things have changed from clips books to now followers & interaction on the virtual world
editorial mention of client or product/service
Any description; i.e. more than a headline or brief (1-3 sentence) abstract
everything from site aggregator to interviews by network news, to appearance on Oprah
Any fool can create a computer program that feeds text to a bunch of Web sites. That is not coverage. Especially for the prices the news wires charge. Plus, they don't give you the names of the reporter who received your news release. Coverage is when an interested reporter REPORTS on your news.
Media clippings + google insights + google trends
Client mention
Exposure to key targets - which may or may not be media
An actual human being took the time to read release/news (no matter how they got thier hands on it e.g. wire distribution/one-on-one outreach via email) and report on it
The inclusion of a company's press release message (i.e. product launches, product reviews, etc.) within that company's targeted media (blogs, industry trades, social media sites, etc.)
Visibility of my client by an objective, third party news source.
article or package developed by independent journalist or blogger



Article in core media, following interview or not, with editorial influence (e.g. re-written by journalist
3rd party journalist or influential blogger personally picking up release and creating story from it.
There are two types in my mind. Industry relevant coverage and non-relevant coverage for SEO
Any and all
media is defined as a tool used to communicate a message. So, would define coverage as being when the message is communicated.
IF THE MESSAGE REACHES THE TARGET AUDIENCE
I think coverage is client-dependent. If media that target my client's buyers covers them, then it's coverage. If mainstream news media covers them, then it's coverage.
journalist-written story where press release triggered interview with mw or my expert and content from interview was used in article. article not involving "fees" (e.g., pay for play, awards that require purchase of promo package, etc.) or affected by ad placements from company issuing press release.
The reach that the news achieved in the media.
news that is written by professional journalists.
Third party interest in an issue, event or product that effects your organization or client
Every time your brand/organization is mentioned or talked about, that's coverage.
A media gatekeeper giving your story placement
anything written, broadcast or otherwise disseminated
Exposure, recognition of brand/product, market growth, positive
Media reports that include the relevant information that was intended for distribution
Basic essentials of press release are utilized factually
Any placement. Of course value varies widely.
a print or online pub picking up the story and printing a piece on it, an interview, a blog post
raising product or individual awereness using high-caliber media outlets
journalists/reporter writes a story that features client
3rd party reporting, (i.e. written by a professional journalist or independent blogger)
Brands, principles
not sure



any pick-up or generated mentions
Flexibly. I look for google news/search results, blogs etc as well as mainstream cover
Reporter-influenced stories and news release pick up by news organizations
pick ups in target media
media placement outcomes
It might be simpler to consider two core types; intentional and unintentional. Intentional coverage would be coverage secured in outlets targeted directly, or which typically serve the target audience(s) specified. Unintentional coverage would be everything else.
third party mentions of an organization's news
When an third-party actually writes a piece. Otherwise it is almost just a distribution of an organization's materials that happens to get published in print or online.
I report on any mention of my organization, which I call media coverage
Coverage on a relevant site or mag/newspaper
Unique content/ unique source versus syndication and/or amplification of unique content
reaching the audiences defined by our strategic plan goals
pick up in client's core media
Coverage in print, broadcast, websites & social networking sites.
If the reporters you have targeted do a story on your client, issue, or event, and the message is reaching the most people in your targeted reach.
Depends on the purpose-- product launch versus crisis mitigation, for example.
Article, whether from news release or interview, appears in news outlets and blogs
getting news of institution/activities/key messages to various public constituents
A publication told your story in words other than your own
a mention, pic or in text to real positive opinion
how many of your targetted readers where able to access the news
Any third-party coverage is credible "coverage" (as opposed to exposure).
Any mention of client in news article, full or partial repost of release
Including your product or service in a story.
Getting my story -- in full --out to various publics



Coverage is when a media outlet carries meaningful information about your product, service or client. The coverage should create curiosity in the target audience to learn more.
key messages included
print or online news media that are widely recognized as subscribing to traditional journalistic standards, especially fairness
For us, the broad definition is coverage by professionally trained journalists who work in broadcast or for editorial publications (print and electronic).
is the message being delivered to the target?
Meaningful inclusion of our client in a story.
Appears in news category of a search engine
Direct or indirect mention of company / product / issue in either core or non core media
being written or talked about (Broadcast)
stories on my client rather than are picked up or generating interviews for client
Includes at least one or two of your organization's key messages; correct information
It should include on-line media coverage
Running all or part of a news release
PR placement in targeted sites or by explicit to target bloggers
material reviewed and published by a journalist
all of the above
That is a very, very good question these days. Unfortunately, I don't think I have an answer for it.
At least getting a wire story, or something that results from a release in a recognized medium other than a trade.
articles written as a result of a press release or open/click thru on the release itself
Earned coverage would be something that the organization does not pay the media for.
Publication of the message in an independent outlet with paid staff
Any distribution of your message that you did not have to pay for
A story placed in a core publication or quotes in a core publication.
release placed in full or release triggers coverage
Coverage means the news reached a broad swath of the target audience and multiple tiers of



influencers, from tactical in sales decision to strategic advisors on client position in industry to stock analysts. It must use the media appropriate to the message.
A story of substance, with the five Ws and the H; not just a sentence or two.
exposure in print, broadcast or online reputable sites, posts by reputable bloggers whose readers match a client's target audience
placement of messages in any form of "news" media
media attention for your company, product, ideas, campaign
Depends upon my objectives
Something that involves a proactive "pick-up" of some kind by an actual, recognized media outlet, not just an autopost on some electronic presence that picks up everything the wire service sends out. A legitimate journalist must have seen your release and opted to use it, cover it or write about it.
original content written by professional or recognized third party either exclusively or in part about the company
editorial beyond a simple list
anything that reinforces my message with the key audience
Story reported reported publicly
Anything from a brief mention to full article or item
It means different things for different clients and different campaigns. One campaign might be more properly focused on metro dailies but blogs are worth little; for another campaign, blogs might be most important while dailies mean nothing.
Story placement in media directed at intended audience.
size of article, tonality and name of publication
story covered by a third party print, video, Internet aggregator
depends what you mean
Accounts in media that "influencers" consider important
Representation of specific information in the media
It ranges from making the news a matter of public record to generating news stories.
Ideally, anything passing through a filter
placement of any kind; I'd prefer to evaluate myself on quality of placement
Not sure



placements in targeted media
Coverage by non-aligned third party, earned media.
Reporting by an organization with integrity.
pick up by print and electronic media
Did it end up where people would see it?
Story that is written, not just a reprint of a PR
Anything that requires some level of editorial judgement and substantial rewriting, ideally within a process that involves actual independent research, interviewing and/or analysis
number of eyes viewing (but term does not encompass impact)
in this context: information from the release being used but with some intervention by a journalist (of any stripe, to include blogger or twitterer) but not just the newswire piece dumped in toto into a site
Media stories or even mentions
A story written by a reporter that explicitly mentions or features my client.
It all depends on your goals
Unpaid, editorial coverage
placement in media vehicle
new article, written or re-written by journalist/source or site that posts news or release that is not an aggregator
articles, not just blurbs
articles rewritten by journalist or influential blogger, press release published in tier 1 outlets
mentions to full stories
Number of articles/pieces produced
any event handled by media manpower and appearing in the news print or electronic
Coverage means editorial intervention, but you have to remember the SEO value of aggregators; SEO is important for people to find your info. Press releases are not just for media anymore --- you can reach your customer directly, which means Web site traffic and sales. That is in fact was PR should be supporting = sales.
A release is re-posted, commented on and/or linked to via Blog, Forum, Twitter, Facebook, etc., an article or comment is written by an editor or by anyone
a person at media outlet decided to use your news, it just didn't show up on their website because it was on the wire.



I define coverage as any print, radio, TV, online media outlet reporting a story. I don't consider newswires, distribution services or aggregator sites as coverage.
Coverage and successful coverage are two different things: coverage implies outlets picking up information and using it, either for their own reporting or using provided copy. Successful coverage is when stories get placed and there is a public or constituent response.
Articles published
editorial effort taken to point an audience towards the release's touchpoints
Coverage is when the journalist shows interest in the story from the press release or interview.
negative, positive, anything with a mention
Broadly -- the information is reported as new by third parties
traditional and nontraditional instance of coverage that includes client
Can I find my client or something they've done in the media?
Where your news is reported in the context that you communicated to your audiences.
what media reports about a certain topic
Messages written by third-party
Any kind of independent media report featuring your client / your company, stimulated by your communication efforts, without merely copying your press releases.
Active engagement in publicizing an event
Picked up and cultivated by media, not simply reposted
Publication in print or on line, or material aired on radio or TV
Getting air time/ink in a positive way
Primarily, stories produced and published by third-parties (journalists and bloggers) and secondarily, posting of news releases and contributed articles on third-party Web sites.
more than simple reproduction of original material. Some editing and/or comment
combination of downloads, traffic, content, sentiment
mention of key concepts from press release (or other document) in the media outlet
Any mention in mass media of any kind
favorable mention of a brand
Third party reporting



Any company mention outside of company-owned media.
Client, product or service mission and/or key messages clearly conveyed as desired in front of primary audiences/customers
Ha. Not sure.
Reporter doing a story
Stories
Messages/press materials being disseminated in such a way that target audiences are likely to find them
an article written by a third party mentioning my client
Any coverage by a media outlet, both traditional and non-traditional.
the coverage of something in the news is the REPORTING of it
A combination of geographic and target audience
Wherever your key message is reprinted online or in print or broadcast online or on television
Third party endorsement AND online PR for inbound marketing
desired editorial placement online or in print
positive and editorial reportage, mentions... sorry, but the answer to this question is outside the scope of the two minutes I devoted to this survey. But do share the findings with me.
readership
That is precisely why I have answered not sure in 7. MY definition of coverage will be diff. from a major multinational spinning. we need a number of definitions. For me it is (eg) the full page article in The Observer last sunday on food security where the Director of one of the Institutes I look after is quoted at length. The article, I may say, resulted from a chance conversation at an 'event' in London which was nothing to do with food security.
Coverage can be any editorial mileage received in tune with the message intended to be disseminated in a campaign
articles or blurbs that aren't reprinted press releases
negative / positive / neutral / full page
placement of release as is, or generation of story by journalist who received release
A mention in a media outlet
story written by journalist or leading blogger
Legitimate news outlet (i.e. newspaper, radio, TV, magazine web site



any earned media or client-related reporting generated by a 3rd party source
Mentioning your product or organization and your issue in various media outlets
from a mention to full exploration of your intended messages
To either actually have a client interviewed by a media outlet or to get them simply mentioned in an article, etc.
Good question. Pick up by someone, somewhere?
An article written by a paid reporter for a branded media outlet.
wherever the release runs that is relevant to the client
Third-party reporting in media that are read by the public.
Original articles writttern by a 3rd party, not posting news releases
writing something about the topic of the release
Mention of client in public domain.
Social Media, Web, Print (break down to magazine, newspaper), TV
Placements of message through out publications - online or print.
Media outlet picking up some info from release
It's different for various industries, topics
objective description of release contents/message
It's not coverage as much as how I define media - aggregator would not be "media coverage" but exposure and SEO
Media coverage is any where a press release appears. Targeted media coverage is more important to most clients than general media coverage.
Mainstream media, social networks, blogs
content includes key messages measured by agreed analysis
Pulbication of key message, in any form (wire, blog, social media, print, etc.), in relevant publications and Web sites.
third party pickup, as opposed to "exposure"
An article in a legitimate media outlet or blog site
At minimum, it is any mention in any news product, electronic, on air or in print.
number of pickups multiplied by number of viewers/readers



see above
Voluntary media decision to cover the story
When the media reports on something that we've done.
Coverage is anything that actual people may read/watch/listen to for information or to interact
Original editorial or content developed by a journalist or blogger (not just regurgitating the press release)
Any mention of your name, company or product in print, broadcast or online. There are going to be stories that are more in depth than others, some may just quote you, some may be entirely about you, but if you're mentioned I would consider that "coverage."
Any third party news outlet, website, blog or web service that provides editorial service to readers/viewers/listeners.
making the cut, especially well-placed in space and time
More impact on people thinking that makes conversation near the coffee machine.
Client mentions in many different mediums.
treatment of my information by any media
written by a legitimate third party non-affiliated with subject
when a media outlet writes & publishes a story about your client
getting seen, getting found
Used by key media with credible context
it's different for every industry, depending on what you're trying to measure
market saturation
Seems pretty obvious: If they media picks it up, it's coverage. Now let's define good and bad.
Our core messages and/or offerings are written or reported in context in outlets that reach our target market(s).
Mentions of message and who it is from
Topic of press release is covered and/or used as part of other reporting.
something that appears in the press, on TV or radio or on a blog or online news site.
Articles resulting from briefings
detailed editorial minimum 400 word outlining client product, service or campaign with client quote and third part quote



as a good/positive coverage, mentioning of my client in good media
Article that has a client mention appearing in print, broadcast, radio, online (either thro news portals, blogs, newswires and other posts)
When a news outlet uses part of or the entire press release sent to them in an article.
Anything appearing online, print or broadcast (editorial) mentioning the brand
any reproduction or reporting of a story by someone not directly involved or professionally involved with it
On a very basic level - the mention of the company name/project name/key spokesperson. At a more developed level - key messages and relevant discussions.
The mention of a client in any external publication, whether online, broadcast or in print.
reporting accurately the story
Anything that talks about X
inclusion of campaign messaging, spokespeople, brand mentions
A story which is driven by and mentions client business
messages that appears in a medium that impacts your chosed audience
Being in the right outlet at the right time-
Clients core messages as communicated by the campaign appearing in agreed core media which reaches the correct target audience
story which is broadcast online, TV, radio or press
The organisation or its key messages featuring in the media be it print, broadcast or online
Volume and amount in different media categories
a topic/issue/subject being reported on in the media
Any mention of our organisation or members in a recognised media organisation.
the amount of media hits your campaign/release achieves. However I would problably define further into postive/neutral/negative as that is of greater use when considering 'coverage' and the effectiveness of communicating our message.
Anything that gets your name specifically mentioned within piece
Your news picked up by any media outlet (online, broadcast or print)
Again based on objectives and who your target audience we are. With rise of social media definitions are thinking and we shoudl be looking beyond traditional print and broadcast and thinking in terms of who and how we influence



distribution of information in recognized channels
A mention which fulfills a given PR objective
key messages printed in target publications
Coverage is meaningless unless the outlet is reputable and trusted by a target audience. A recognised media outlet and reliable journalist / writer is what constitutes meaningful coverage to me.
Both prominent coverage and mention coverage of one's organization, product or campaign detailing current events
Discussion of client's product / service in core and or non-core media.
Editorial that supports the aims of the client
Editorial that supports the aims of the client
Anything that gives us an accurate namecheck
The presence of our press releases within media which reaches our target market
pick up across various media of the announcement we are placing and the level of interest we get back or the debate that the announcement creates.
As per Q4
Published positive information about a company, its products or services
Public mentions money (alone) can't buy
words or images in print, broadcast or web media
Any online, print or broadcast item which mentions the story
An editorial write up or broadcast piece about the story
Use of brand name
any mention of core messages in any media (which are in turn graded for value according to audience and influence)
Coverage is the totality of media "hits" one might receive about a particular story. This is not just from press releases, it can be from conversations with journalists, online dissemination through twitter et al, or through development of feature material for a journalist (this list is not exhaustive!)
Appearing on a media outlet that was not placed there directly by yourself
Any print or online editorial (ie not paid for) mention of client
mention of brand in relation to specific topic



Mentions of our business in the full range of media outlets
I think "media coverage" should mean articles in mainstream, popular news outlets - online, print and broadcast - but some distinction should be made between those professional journalism sources and blogging or news aggregators.
The reporting of our paper, with clear mention of the journal and written by a verified journalist, member of the media or an 'established' blogger.
Anything that mentions the client, though this is not the same as good coverage or positive coverage, both of which should be judged based on individual client needs
Words, sounds or pictures that convey a client story, ideally with named mention
communication by a third party of client messages
Being written about where somebody could read it
Anything that helps to get your clients name in the media
A name-check
Any mention of organisation (or organisation's materials) in the media
Third party reporting of our "stories", but including news aggregator sites, blogs, etc.
At least a name check in an online or print article, radio/TV broadcast, podcast or blog.
Accurate and positive information about organisation in the relevant media
Any reference, in any publically-available media, anywhere, to your organisation or what it is doing or saying
any mention of the client. Secured coverage must have a credit.
Company mention in press
Any 3rd party (ie not marketing collateral) mentions of your brand, products, services.
Newspaper/Radio/websites/TV
Articles appearing in media, generated by PR team
endorsement from an independent, third-party
name and key message attributed to client
broader dissemination than we paid for.
Number of impressions
Broadly - media core or otherwise covers the piece of news that the organisation wants in the public eye.



Content by a professional journalist or blogger containing client products, spokespeople and/or messages.

Use of materials by core media

a client mention or more in national, regional, Monthly or Online titles

Anything with a relevant audience

Coverage is the placement of your story within a publication with some editorial input, either printed, online or broadcast

your message being targeted to core audience abundantly

Anything in the media on the subject in question - it can be positive, negative or neutral.

Any time the organisation I work for is mention in the media

Your news story appearing in the core media read by your publics, and subject to some degree of editorial influence, whether it is a re-write, a journalist-written introduction, or comment / editorial opinion.

Editorial that appears in a media title regularly read by our targeted audience.



## **Appendix 2 – Interviews with press release distribution services**

Interviews were conducted with PR Newswire, SourceWire and Business Wire throughout October 2009. PR Web were contacted, but declined to participate.

Interviews with sales representatives were conducted by telephone and / or email. Each interviewee was asked the same set of six questions:

- 1) How many releases get placed on the wire every day?**
  
- 2) How many result in placements within the news media, and what is the average number of placements for each release?**
  
- 3) *How do you define "the news media"? Do you differentiate between more and less valuable news outlets?***
  
- 4) Do you grade the type of coverage achieved in terms of publics reached?**
  
- 5) How do you work with clients to agree on evaluating the coverage achieved?**
  
- 6) What defines editorial coverage?**

The author would like to convey his immense gratitude to the representatives of PR Newswire, Business Wire and SourceWire for their time and patience in answering his questions.



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<sup>viii</sup> Cutlip *et al.* (2000)



<sup>ix</sup> Scott, D. (2007) p. 169

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<sup>xii</sup> Kitchen, P. (1997) p. 285

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