

GUIDE

# How to Set KPIs for Communications Success



# Intro

Without solid KPIs it's impossible to accurately measure how your comms team is progressing towards business objectives. Yet with so many possible metrics available it can be difficult to know where to start.

If that dilemma sounds familiar, fear not: support setting strong KPIs is something even Whispr Group's most successful customers ask for. In this guide we share some of that knowledge, with actionable insights to help get the ball rolling and start setting the right KPIs for communications success.





## GETTING STARTED

# KPIs for any comms team (quantitative)

“On a quantitative level, in order to simply check that your brand has some form of traction or exposure and take a measure that you can later analyse on a qualitative level, there are two very fundamental KPIs,” Whispr Group communications expert and Intelligence Product Director Simon Scharfstein explains:





“Start with the number of articles naming your brand or number of mentions on social media. I’ve noticed among all the customers I’ve worked with in 15 years that there are constantly questions from PR and Comms departments who want to get a grip on ‘how much are we really being seen?’.

“It’s not uncommon to have an excellent idea of what competitors are doing and how much they’re seen, because everyone is always worried about the competition, and to be less certain about their own brand!”

“To make a comparison easier and benchmark against your marketing department’s efforts – who often measure reach for their campaigns – I usually complement the first measure with a measure of reach. We work with a lot of customers who want to be thought leaders, and if they’ve managed to get a good reach among relevant social media influencers in the political or public affairs area, they’ve managed to get their issue into the right context. Reach is also much easier to compare with your marketing department than measuring ‘number of articles’ would be.”



# KPIs for any comms team (qualitative)

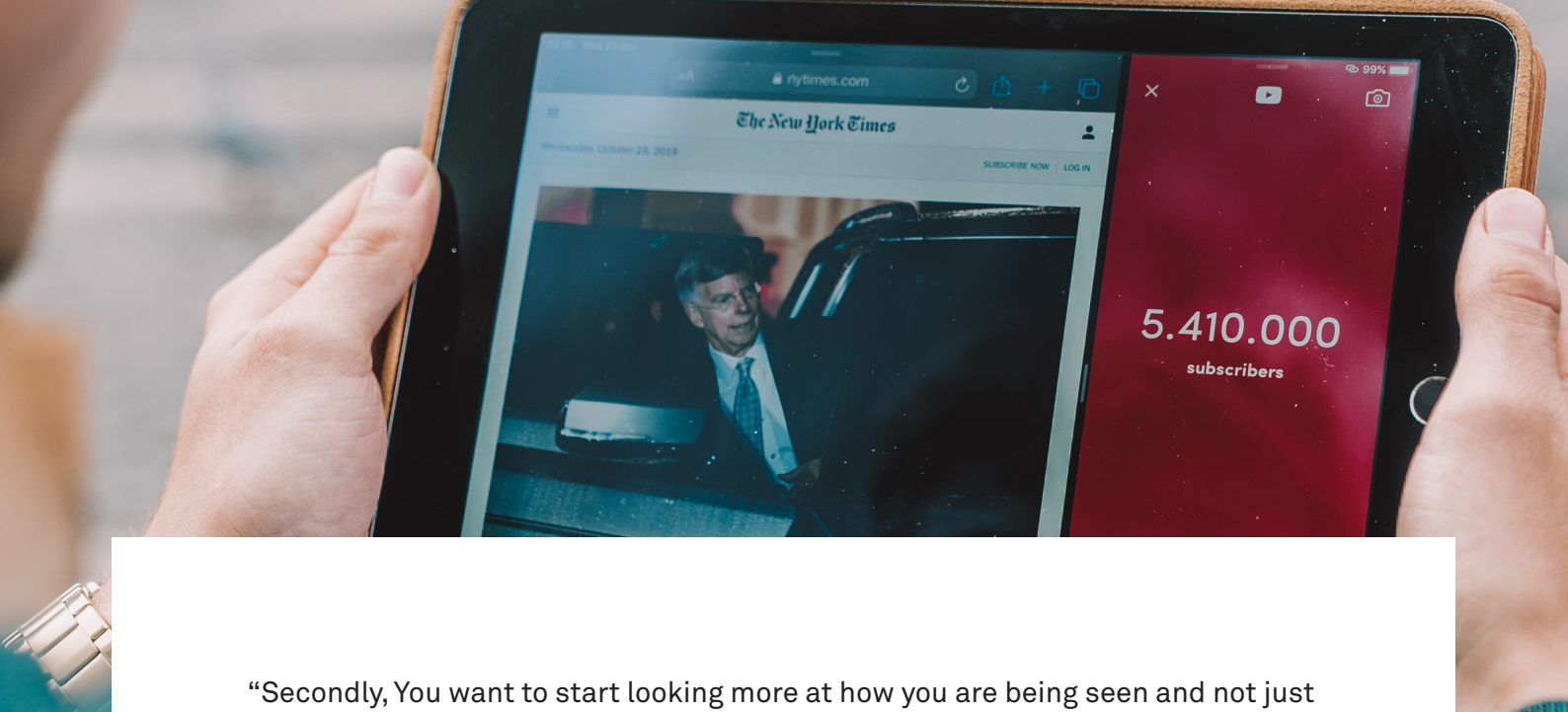
“On a more complex level I’d recommend analysing whether a significant proportion of your media coverage is in outlets that are of high relevance for you, the media category as we call it at Whispr Group.”

“If you’re a private healthcare provider for example, being present among the big national media outlets may not be relevant for your communications goals.”

“ Instead you may want to be seen in the local media that’s influential in a particular town, as that’s where your potential patients are most likely to be reached. So a KPI where the target is to have ‘x’ percent of articles about your brand in the local media category would be useful.”

“For brands working more in the public affairs area by contrast, they absolutely want to more often than not be in the major influential national outlets. So their media category KPI could instead be that they want at least 5% percent of articles referencing them each year to be in a national media outlet or influential industry press.”





“Secondly, You want to start looking more at how you are being seen and not just how much. Whispr Group’s Media Index is based on how good the exposure for your brand is: you get more points if your brand is named earlier in an article, in a headline, in an image caption, it accounts for the size of the article. The things that make it more likely a reader would have seen your brand and messaging.”

“You also get more points if the context is relevant. That’s really useful because you can benchmark it against yourself over time, to constantly track if you’re managing to be relevant: if your media index is declining, you’re likely being mentioned more in a peripheral way. Your brand is possibly being mentioned in a context that you don’t desire.”


#### EXPERT TIP

## Using KPIs to Inspire

“It’s important that your team believes they can genuinely impact your KPIs, and that in turn should help inspire and motivate them.”

“We work a lot with measuring the impact of spokespersons for example, making sure to record when they give comments to the press, and account for their proactivity away from standard press releases: informing journalists about initiatives, having regular contact with them, being readily available to provide nuance to stories.”



The background of the page is a composite image. On the left, there is a stack of newspapers. The top newspaper has a large, bold, black and white graphic that says "YO!" inside a square. Below this, the word "Leaving" is visible in a large, bold, black font. Underneath "Leaving", the text "BY SAM CATANZARO" is printed. Further down, there is a paragraph of text that starts with "The beach has always been one of identity and is currently at the center of a battle between the City and activists. The beach is a beautiful place, but it's also a place where the City and activists are at odds." To the right of the newspapers, there is a pumpkin. At the bottom of the page, there is a cup of coffee with a latte art design. The entire background has a dark, blueish-purple tint.

“A useful KPI in that regard is source of media coverage assessing whether your comms department is the source and initiated the coverage – that can also tell you how much passive media coverage there is, which you didn’t have to initiate directly (and in many cases is something you want to increase as resources can be applied elsewhere).”

“Another valuable one for brands of a certain size is to measure the number of negative articles where balance was provided by your team. That’s often important for large B2C companies where if something like a technical issue with their service happens that impacts their business negatively, their team needs to be visible and let customers know that it’s being resolved. If the team is working hard in those situations as they should be, it’s important to measure and recognise that.”

“It’s also good to measure the internal work that sometimes goes unseen because the output isn’t directly from your team’s mouth: if they helped your CEO to write a comment that is given to the press, to communicate externally in some way, that’s important work. If your CEO’s quote is then present in 70 percent of articles about this particular initiative, your comms team has really succeeded in their work and in packaging the information in the right way. That should be tracked and recognised.”

#### EXPERT TIP

## When To Rethink

In the digital age the media landscape is constantly changing so it can be tempting for communications teams believe their KPIs also need to shift at a fast rate, but really you should only be reevaluating them once a year and no more frequently than that.

Why? You need a whole year of data to make a truly valuable like-for-like comparison, and you also need to believe when you first set your KPI that it doesn’t need to be changed. If it is built on solid foundations it shouldn’t need to be revised too quickly.

Of course, things can then happen: strategic decisions may have been taken in your organization, perhaps you’re entering new markets, releasing new products, focusing more on sustainability in ways that weren’t as important before.

Even then, if possible it can be better to add a new KPI as a compliment to measure the consequences of that organisational change, rather than take a KPI away, as it makes it easier to maintain continuity over the years.





#### EXPERT TIP

## How many is too many?

“You can’t just keep adding KPIs in perpetuity. In fact, if you have too many they can start to contradict each other.”

“A simple example could be if you have a reach KPI that’s measured quantitatively and demands high reach, but at the same time you have a more qualitative KPI tracking how much your business is seen in local media relevant to your customers.

That could be a problem, because the pursuit of high reach could counteract the pursuit of more local coverage.”



“The solution there could be that it’s more appropriate to set a reach KPI for your organisation’s major financial and business news, for example, but not applying it to your general communications work, where local media is the target anyway.

You ultimately have to decide at some point what the most important KPIs are, and be careful to make sure they don’t counteract each other, and instead combine to provide a clearer picture. There are always exceptions but somewhere between three and five comms KPIs is usually enough for many businesses.”





## KEY TAKEAWAYS

# Setting KPIs for Comms Success

The individual needs of every communications team will ultimately vary, but there are some general rules to follow for setting solid KPIs to help you accurately measure and follow-up on your comms efforts, as outlined above.

Here's a reminder of the key points:

- 01.** To get things going, two absolutely fundamental qualitative KPIs for communications work are number of articles and reach.

Adding Whispr Group's Media Index to that can give you a more qualitative understanding of how relevant the consequences of your comms output is.

**02.** Make sure your KPIs truly measure all the (no doubt hard) work your comms team is doing.

Get that right and it should help inspire and motivate them, not to mention give you a data-based overview of how resources are being allocated and reveal any possible red flags there.

**03.** Don't revise your KPIs more frequently than once a year, and even if there's a change in strategy to account for, consider whether adding a new KPI is a more effective option than taking one away.

That said, as the number of communications KPIs you have increases, so too does the risk they counteract each other. Most organisations don't need more than between three and five.





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