

The **VRIS Model** for Determining PR Success

*Cymfony brings **Verismo** to PR Measurement*

Measurement has been a hot topic in the PR Industry for years. Despite numerous approaches and a wealth of metrics, the industry is still criticized for a lack of clarity. Cymfony's **Verismo** model is rooted in the concept that any measurement should reflect the degree of successful achievement of communication objectives, not tactical or granular "outputs". The approach outlined in this white paper uses the wealth of data available through a robust measurement platform to answer the two foundational questions of successful communication.

MEASUREMENT MOMENTUM

PR measurement continues to grow in importance due to increasing interest from senior executives, advancements in technology, and a wealth of guidance on measurement approaches. Yet despite this degree of focus and this array of resources, the field continues to be plagued by a lack of clarity around what should be measured, how to relate these metrics to important goals, and how to meaningfully communicate efforts to non-PR executives.

To a large degree, this difficulty is inherent to the PR discipline. With advertising, the placement and message content are planned and controlled; PR is, of course, at the mercy of editors and journalists as to whether a particular company or brand is included in an article and, if it is, what message is communicated. So while the advertising executive knows before the campaign launches how large an audience will see the communication and what messages they will see, the PR executive must begin their measurement process by quantifying the audience and making a qualitative assessment of message communication.

There is no shortage of lengthy lists of characteristics to understand message content and numerous data points are often presented in measurement reports. These data can include the length of the article, the prominence of the brand involved (which alone can involve several variables), the presence of key messages, quotes by company spokespeople and many more. A frequent complaint from senior management and other non-PR executives is that there are too many metrics, often specific only to PR, and not easy for non-PR professionals to understand.

In addition, the field of PR measurement has created terms like “outputs” and “outcomes”, asserted as a shared language but whose definitions are unclear and whose usage is inconsistent. Worse, these terms hold little meaning for -- and may even confuse -- the audience to whom we must convey the business value of public relations activities and budgets.

As a result, many PR measurement initiatives, despite myriad data points, fail to provide the metrics on which communication professionals and executives can take action or clearly assess the influence of an initiative. What PR needs is a simple approach that uses plain English to explain the effect of its initiatives.

SINGLE SCORE INDEX: ONE STEP FORWARD

A recent innovation to solve this problem has been the concept of a single score index - an algorithm that combines related data points about PR's effectiveness into a single number that is then presented as a key performance metric of the success of PR initiatives. While this approach can successfully be used to overcome some of the hurdles outlined above, it introduces its own challenges:

- **The “One Size Fits All” factor.** Many firms who offer this approach have one algorithm which they apply to all of their clients, as well as, all of their different communication goals. The simplicity and low cost of this methodology are offset by the fact that this cookie cutter approach can’t accurately represent success for the wide disparity of needs across the spectrum of the PR profession.
- **The “Black Box” factor.** Often the algorithm is not explained in detail and even if it is, not all executives to whom it is reported understand how the number reflects success, undercutting the goal of clear communication of results. Beyond this, the lack of transparency may lead to a lack of trust in the index and a question as to whether or not the index is being manipulated to make results look more successful.
- **The “Lack of Context” factor.** This factor is closely related to the black box. If the Index reports, say, a 97.5 for a particular period of time, anyone not deeply familiar with the index may rightfully ask, “Is that good?”. And even if they understand the quality this number portrays, their next question may be “How do we improve the score? What are the specific steps we must take to increase our index score?”

Cymfony has had success with these types of indices for a number of our clients. To avoid the downsides of the factors listed above, we take a different, more customized approach:

Measure achievement of communications objectives

- Experts in PR measurement, including Cymfony, recommend that for any measurement to be meaningful, it must reflect the actual goals of the initiative. Rather than restate measures of impressions, clips or other volume-oriented numbers, we build an algorithm that reflects the objective.

Customization to client needs, goals and budget

- Because clients are the experts in what they are trying to achieve, partnering with them to understand their goals and recommending an algorithm that is affordable and meaningful is essential. We design our algorithm to reflect client preferences for which measures of circulation, prominence, etc. are important in their organization.

Consultative approach

- Translating client goals into a meaningful index requires methodological expertise that addresses current measurement goals and enables the flexibility to evolve over time.

Transparency

- Because of the collaboration between Cymfony and our clients, the index can readily be explained to management, staff and others who need to have confidence in it. Another benefit is that the client can “decompose” the index, to identify areas for improvement, based on the specific inputs that influence the final number.

BEYOND THE SINGLE SCORE: INTRODUCING VERISMO, THE VRIS MODEL

We’ve lately been guiding our clients to a different approach, one that provides two numbers rather than a single number. Cymfony believes this is a superior approach because there are two overarching questions that PR must answer to determine its success:

- Did the initiative reach the intended audience?
- Did we communicate the key message(s) we wanted to?

The **reach component** is a simple calculation based on the target or “stature” media list: divide the total circulation of key publications that ran a story by the aggregate circulation of all publications on the target media list. This allows PR to tell management that their efforts delivered key messages to 82% of their core target audience.

The **message communication component** is more complex and must be applied to each individual article. PR rightly recognizes that there are many variables that impact whether a reader is likely to see the brand or company messages and have his opinion influenced by the placement. But to be meaningful, these myriad data points must be harnessed into a comprehensible framework.

To achieve this degree of focus, Cymfony includes four broad elements to measure message communications effectiveness:

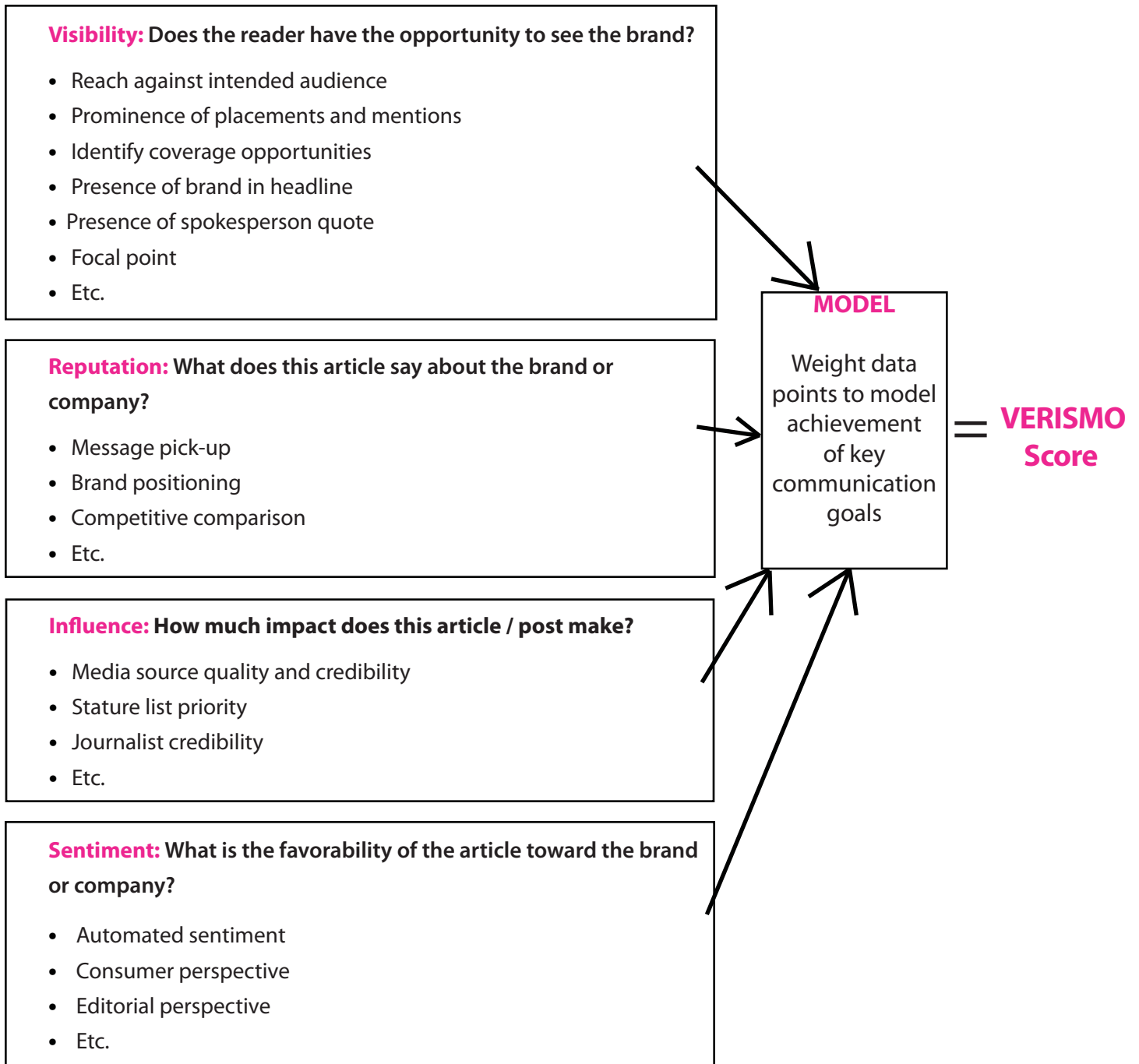
- **Visibility**
- **Reputation**
- **Influence**
- **Sentiment**

By then weighting each of these components to reflect the company’s goals and priorities, Cymfony creates a model of the degree to which an article delivers against the communication objectives (see Figure 1).

This VRIS Model, which we dub “VERISMO”, lets the PR professional report, for example, that their efforts resulted in reaching 87% of the intended audience with a “VERISMO” score which indicates that 75% of the hoped-for message was included.

Figure 1: **VERISMO** Components and Definitions

Cymfony's Verismo model offers flexibility in designing the system to reflect different communication objectives and measurement priorities. The data variables listed under each definition are examples to illustrate this flexibility, but do not represent the full list of potential data points.



Building a Verismo Score

The usefulness and value of the Verismo model requires careful thought, planning, and implementation. Cymfony employs a four-stage process to build a Verismo model:

- **Frame:** The Verismo process begins with clearly stating the objectives of PR efforts, deciding how to weigh the four VRIS elements of the model to best reflect those objectives, and understanding the budget available to support the measurement effort.
- **Design:** Building on the framework established in the prior stage, the actual data points that best define each element and the weights given to each data point are determined.
- **Validate:** Next, we apply the draft model to a sample of PR coverage, review the scores and determine if the model is delivering appropriate scores. Weights can be adjusted to achieve the optimal results.
- **Rollout:** Finally, we apply the model to all coverage.

A model can be relatively simple and highly automated: for example, automated detection of the number of brand mentions can form a simple, inexpensive way to determine visibility. Clients who define visibility in a more nuanced way, (for example, the prominence of the brand or company in the article) may opt for a manual reading and classification system.

Cymfony's Orchestra platform along with our extensive manual rating capabilities offers a wealth of data points that can be used to create and calculate a Verismo score.

Using a Verismo Score

The combination of reach and message communication that the Verismo model represents makes PR's success readily understandable by non-PR executives. The flexibility of this approach allows it to be used for a variety of measurement tasks:

- **Report to different stakeholders:** Because each article receives a Verismo score, media coverage can be segmented by region, date range, individual business units, specific announcements, etc. PR can thus show executives with different areas of responsibility relevant data to demonstrate their contribution.
- **Prior period comparisons:** Because Verismo measures the achievement of a communication objective, it results in more meaningful comparisons to a prior quarter's or year's results. Reach and message communication metrics remain constant even though these specific elements change. For example, comparing the amount of coverage may not be appropriate if the definition of the target audience changes.

- **Diagnostic tool:** Decomposing the score into its four components will reveal opportunities to strengthen future communications efforts. The PR professional can identify relatively low-scoring elements and strategically plan initiatives to raise those scores.

CONCLUSION

What differentiates the Verismo score is that it uses a clear, concise set of components that capture the essential elements of successful communication, can be customized according to precise communications objectives, simply communicates results in a language stakeholders understand and allows the PR professional to pinpoint areas of improvement.

Simply stated, the Verismo score simultaneously fulfills the needs of both PR professionals and their stakeholders: clear results reporting, relevance to company goals and insight to improve future results.

About TNS Cymfony

TNS Cymfony, a market influence analytics company, scans and interprets the millions of voices at the intersection of social and traditional media. TNS Cymfony works with marketing, research and PR professionals worldwide, offering a range of packaged services that address areas such as social media strategy, consumer opinions and trends, customer satisfaction, PR measurement, and reputation management.

To learn your **VRISMO** score and the influence of your public relations and communications efforts, please call 617-673-6000 extension 2 or email sales@cymfony.com.

