

Measure to Create Social Impact

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Ed Talks



The business luminary Peter Drucker's famous quote, "You can't manage what you don't measure," is well applied to determining the success of any community outreach efforts. Without metrics in place, no one can tell if a program has any impact. But the success of virtually all outreach programs can be measured if an assessment component is built into the initial design of the program.

Hiring an expert who knows how to use metrics for measuring social impact is the best way to ensure that you are making a difference in your communities. But it is also possible to establish those social impact metrics on your own. I have spent 40 years advising clients about how to measure community outreach and marketing programs. My conclusion: If you can't measure it, then don't do it.

Schools are the Heart of Every Community

School outreach is a method of bringing educationally-rich information, resources, and/or experiences experiences to teachers, students and their families on a local, state and national scale. Many companies have a robust educational portfolio with a variety of active school sponsorships, reaching students from kindergarten to twelfth grade (K-12). NTC has distributed programs that include: emergency preparedness, safety, career development, energy efficiency, water conservation, financial literacy, nutrition and fitness, bullying prevention and STEM disciplines.

Because of the unique relationship of K-12 schools to each neighborhood around it, this type of community outreach is inherently cost effective and measurable.

Choosing the Right Program for the Right Reasons

There are five basic categories of school outreach that create social impact:

- Sponsored Curriculum
- Volunteer Outreach to Schools
- Extracurricular Activities
- Train the Trainer
- Virtual and In-School Events

Each comes with varying strengths and shortcomings, which means that your company must make comparisons in order to match the right types of school programs to your particular needs and goals.

Most companies don't have a single department with formal jurisdiction over the use of educational outreach programs that I will call **school sponsorships**.

Instead, the school sponsorship channel is actively utilized by a number of business groups within the company. Each business group often works its sponsorships independently. Each business unit also has specific goals that are focused on some portion of the organization's success. The following are examples of desired outcomes I have focused on for clients:

- **Human Resources** Increased interest in energy, STEM disciplines, banking and healthcare among high school students to stimulate new employee recruiting in order to replace an aging workforce
- **Public Relations** Novel and interesting news for the media that generates a high number of total impressions with a positive tone

- **Investor Relations** Positive news for annual reports that demonstrates significant activities that fulfill mandates for corporate social responsibility
- **Program Marketing** Seeking a cost-effective and uncluttered channel for communicating to customers, both segment-specific and mass market, in order to better achieve campaign goals
- **Safety and Emergency Preparedness** Documented safety communications and emergency planning efforts to educate the community and reduce accidents involving children

For proper oversight and a meaningful evaluation for the entire organization, it is important that there be systematic coordination across these distinct silos.

What Distance Learning Means for Your School Outreach Program

The events of 2020 have completely transformed K-12 educational outreach. As the COVID-19 pandemic forces most schools to shift to distance learning or a hybrid approach that combines classroom and digital instruction, it's important for school outreach programs to be flexible in adapting to these unpredictable times.

There are five main components that education experts say distance learning must have in order to teach and inspire students. In implementing new digital alternatives such as livestream events, expanded online curriculum, videos, e-books, and more, NTC is working to measure and continuously improve these five essential aspects of distance learning:

1 CONNECTION AND COMMUNICATION

Any kind of learning process must form a connection between educators and students and make two-way communication easy. This can be achieved digitally through live chat, e-conferencing and learning management systems like Blackboard and Google Classroom. Whichever form of school outreach your organization uses, make sure you prioritize interactivity and measure the ease of communication.

2 ORGANIZATION Teachers are more burdened and overwhelmed than ever before; it's important that you make your K-12 outreach as organized and efficient as possible. Your livestream programs, digital curriculum, and other distance learning resources must be compatible across all platforms and easy for teachers to access on a well-designed website or app.

3 LESSON DESIGN It goes without saying that educational lessons should be fun, engaging, informative and memorable. If anything, this is even more vital for digital education programs. As with our in-school theatrical performances, we ask teachers and students to evaluate the educational impact and ability to retain the lessons included in our digital curriculum.

4 OPTIONS FOR DELIVERING CONTENT

Digital education makes it possible to teach students through videos, podcasts, maps, multimedia presentations – practically any format

conceivable. Make sure your digital outreach programs utilize the wealth of content available online, and track what formats are most impactful for teachers and students in your community.

5 OPTIONS FOR DEMONSTRATING

LEARNING It's always important to measure students' retention of information. Digital education means that is no longer confined to tests and quizzes. Students and educators can interact directly with your organization and help shape the learning experience you provide in creative ways. When you solicit feedback from this important audience and incorporate their creativity, you not only make your digital program as effective as possible – you also form an important connection by making them a part of the process.

What is an education audit?

Developing an evaluation system starts with understanding the six components of social impact. These components are:

1 EDUCATIONAL VALUE

Leave the students more informed and empowered than you found them.

2 CONSISTENCY AT SCALE

Bring your sponsorship to as large an audience as possible while retaining quality.

3 COST PER STUDENT

Calculate how much you are spending or would like to spend on each student.

4

MEASURABLE USAGE

Ensure that the information and material you offer to schools is being used and is essential to making a long-term difference.

5

PARENTAL ACTIVATION

Get the families of students involved by taking your desired actions, such as signing up for an event, playing a game or ordering a kit.

6

PUBLIC RELATIONS VALUE

How well does the sponsorship serve your image in the community?

What does success look like?

The key lies in defining what success is for each business unit and for the organization as a whole. When you define success, set your corporate goals and specific program objectives. For instance, if your objective over the next two years is to reach 200,000 parents through their children, or to generate seven million positive earned media impressions across 40 media markets, then you have a target that you plan to reach and a way to measure your progress toward achieving it. A well-designed educational sponsorship will help you get there; an inappropriate or poorly designed program will not.

However, it is paramount to recall that *business* objectives are not *educational* objectives. They are different. Business objectives guide your choice of sponsorship opportunity. Educational objectives guide the design and implementation of the digital or in-school program. The two come

together in the selection of metrics for determining success. But true success is typically broader than any one metric, such as the number of parents reached or media impressions generated. True success arises when the program scores well on all six components of the education audit.

To find alignment between business and educational objectives, start with the business goal you seek to achieve and then determine whether it can be legitimately addressed within the school channel. Parent activation, corporate social responsibility, a well-educated workforce, a better reputation in the community, positive public relations, and being seen as a community-focused company are all business objectives that align well with the school channel. Simply increasing sales is not in alignment.

Under no circumstances should promotional material be presented as educational. Within the curriculum, text, e-books, videos and other digital lessons must not contain any of the sponsor's brand names, trademarks, related trade names or corporate identification. Corporate identification, however, should be stated clearly and in a prominent place – for example, the front or back cover of publications or in the titles of videos or teaching packs. No implied or explicit sales message, exhortation to buy a product or service, merchandising slogan or other attempts to influence the purchasing decisions of pupils, or their families, should be included.

However, if an electric utility wants to

reduce the kWh usage of residential customers, that can be turned into an appropriate objective. For instance, we have devised award-winning school programs that deliver proven energy savings by causing parents to order free energy efficiency kits and install the measures through school sponsored programs.

Six Components of Social Impact

EDUCATIONAL VALUE The primary component of the educational audit is to determine the educational value of the program. The basic tenet of a legitimate school sponsorship is that it must have educational value to the students. Without clear educational value, educators will not – and should not – let a program into the school. The educational value is comprised of three distinct areas:

Alignment with Educational Standards

There are only so many hours in a school day, and distance or hybrid learning approaches make that time even more valuable. Educators are responsible for meeting the educational standards set by their districts and states within those limited hours. Therefore, the more closely the educational content of a program aligns with state and national education standards, the more likely that the program will be welcomed by teachers.

Data Validation and Verification How well is the information being delivered to the students via the program? That is, is the program actually educating students and is there measurable verification?

Age Appropriateness Obviously, the

most effective educational programs are those that accurately target specific age groups with appropriate vocabulary, pictures, graphics, analogies, etc. If a program is not age appropriate, teachers will have to adapt the content and presentation to fit the needs of the students and this will limit its usage.

CONSISTENCY AT SCALE

2 A sponsorship that performs well at a handful of schools is a nice thing, but if your organization is going to maximize the value of the sponsorship, then it must scale appropriately to your entire footprint – everywhere your products or services are offered to your customers. That geographic area is likely to encompass multiple school districts spread across an entire service territory or multi-state region.

Sponsoring a digital education program can help your organization efficiently reach a large number of schools across your entire service area. But it's a double-edged sword: while your scope and scale may expand, your outreach to all schools in your community must stay consistent and focused on the educational value. The vast reach of a digital education program means little if schools in your area don't utilize your offerings.

COST PER STUDENT

3 Cost per student is the amount of money spent to reach a student (or family) with an educational program. The value you receive from a given sponsorship is measured using the other five components of social impact through an Education Audit. Thus, for the purpose of an evaluation, you start with the value and divide by the price to get the true unit cost.

While educational programs with costs of less than \$1 per student are certainly desirable because they tread lightly on budgets, and while programs with costs of \$100 or more per student may strain those budgets, there is no ideal cost per student. Because educational programs are uniquely designed to meet the needs of individual organizations, program costs are often relative to the needs of the business unit, the quality of the educational materials and the ultimate value derived by both you and the school. Nonetheless, when all five types of sponsorship are considered across a range of deployment scales, NTC finds that educational sponsors typically see an average cost of \$5-\$10 per student.

Note: I have come to realize that most volunteer outreach programs implemented by organizations themselves have a relatively high cost per student in spite of the fact that they are executed by their own employees. It seems as if it should be one of the lower cost sponsorship options. However, in most cases the word "volunteer" is a bit misleading since the individual sent to the school is an employee. Volunteers from your company are still on your payroll and their time away from their duties is still on the company clock, though the work they would otherwise accomplish is lost. If the volunteer is a corporate executive, the per student cost can be even higher. Whether your educational outreach is presented virtually or live in schools, having your own employees volunteer their time is ultimately an inefficient and high-cost expense.

4

MEASURABLE USAGE

While cost comparisons are a fundamental part of the education audit, they are incomplete unless you also know whether your sponsorships are actually engaging students with your educational materials. Regardless of how much you may have paid for your sponsorship, it is not a good deal if your materials are ignored by students, disrespected by teachers, or unused on a web page that experiences very little engagement. It is for this reason that I incorporate a measurable usage score into the education audit.

Measurable usage evaluation can be tricky. It must be rated based upon the reliability of the data being used to calculate the number of students who are actively engaged in using your educational materials. Truly valuable data is compiled when usage is systematically measured and reported over a long period of time, such as the number of students and teachers who log on to view an online event and the reported usage of digital materials by teachers or parents.

One of the advantages of calculating measurable usage is that it enables you to compare the unmeasured costs per student with costs based upon measured usage.

5

PARENT ACTIVATION

One of the primary advantages of using K-12 school programs are their unique ability to reach and influence parents of school-aged students. When parents see an educational sponsorship that has been accepted by teachers,

there is a tacit – and somewhat logical – assumption that the school endorses the program sponsor. This tends to enhance the sponsor's reputation in a parent's mind. Sponsorships that include a parental activation component also provide a channel for communicating an integrated message to both students and their parents. Behavior changes are naturally more likely when students and their parents are working from the same set of information.

Parent activation is a calculation of the number of parents who are impacted as a result of the educational program. Activation is calculated based on a research-derived formula for the number of adults that a child is likely to influence (usually 1.6 adults per student). Parent activation would then be calculated by the number of kits ordered by parents, the download of apps or the number of page views of educational websites included in the digital program.

6

PUBLIC RELATIONS VALUE

While legitimate school sponsorships should not be confused with advertisements or cause-related marketing, they certainly can enhance the reputation of the sponsor. Indeed, organizations that work with schools to deliver educational opportunities to students can – and should – get significant recognition for their efforts throughout the communities they serve. Organizations who want to receive measurable public relations value for their educational outreach need to select the correct type of program and then leverage the PR value of that program.

Comparing media impressions and media impact provides direct insights into the amount of public relations value available in a program. Some types of sponsorships, such as digital education programs that incorporate livestream events, games, videos and e-books, hold some PR potential if they are handled in a way that leverages their novelty, usefulness or other newsworthiness, such as winning awards. The best type of sponsorships for PR value are those that can generate actual media coverage, whether that exposure is in traditional media outlets or more focused channels such as a parent newsletter article, social media posts, a sponsored blog or a website that can be visited by the public.

Connecting social impact to business strategy is the goal of every high quality community outreach program. By using these six components of evaluating school programs' social impact, each business unit can manage their unique objectives and the entire organization can benefit from their results.

Public relations measurement and impact multipliers are derived from the Public Relations Society of America Advertising Value Equivalency. While there is no universally agreed upon standard method for comparing advertising impressions to editorial impressions, for the purpose of this paper, editorial copy should be given a weighting of three times the value of advertising space.



Author Ward Eames is President and Founder of NTC. He has over 40 years of experience working in schools throughout the country. Ward's Minneapolis-based company presents educational sponsorships on behalf of corporations, nonprofits and governmental organizations.

NTC is a premium provider of educational programming with operations in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. We work directly between schools and clients to promote beneficial behaviors and life skills to students in grades K-12 on a local, regional and national level.

Since 1978, we have formed connections and helped develop relationships between thousands of schools and corporations, nonprofits and governmental organizations. Our value is not just in the impact we create; our turnkey services also change the lives and trajectories of students, mobilize parents and entire families with beneficial messages, and cultivate community-wide goodwill for clients.

Our award-winning educational programs are free for schools and are customizable to accommodate specific messages for clients. Through formats including live performance, in-class discussion, graphic novels, print curriculum, and digital games and activities, we present topics such as health and wellness, STEM disciplines, energy conservation, safety, financial literacy, water and environmental stewardship in ways that engage and empower students. In doing so, we are helping our clients to be forces of change for students, parents and communities.

Everything
Connects with

