

Media measurement and AVE Values: Here's why it's still a thing

By  Joe Hamman

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When I first started working in the PR & Communications industry, people would talk about the 'thud factor': the sound that a clippings book makes when it hits a client's desk. The more coverage they got, the thicker the book, the louder the thud. This would be followed by the inevitable question: 'What's our AVE Value?'



Source: Kindel Media from [Pexels](#)

Twenty years later, and our measurement methods have got far more sophisticated. We measure everything from sentiment to share of voice to message penetration. But one thing hasn't gone away: whether you like it or not, AVE (Advertising Value Equivalency) remains a popular way of showing how much value you got from your media efforts. Unless a client specifically asks for it to be taken out, it's included in practically every report we send out. In fact, many clients insist on it.

The debate around AVE has raged for years, and trust me, it will rage for some time to come. The biggest argument against AVE is that PR isn't advertising, and should not be compared with it. And no, it's not a sophisticated or insightful means of measurement. But while AVE should never be used as the sole measurement of PR outcomes, it's certainly useful as one of many metrics – and here's why.

It's easy to understand

The main attraction of AVE is that it helps you explain the value of PR to people who're not familiar with marketing and media. Finance people don't understand prominence, frequency and impressions. They get AVE. In tough economic times, it's critical that you're able to provide a clear return on investment (ROI) to the business.

It makes the PR function look good

Telling a board of directors, or a company MD, that you've secured coverage worth millions of rands doesn't just make the PR agency look good. It makes the client look good. It makes the entire industry look good, for that matter. And once PR has earned the seat at the table, then it's easier to start educating the business about the broader value of PR.

It gives the business certainty

It's traditionally been risky for a PR agency to guarantee coverage in any media. But what they can do is set monthly, quarterly and annual AVE targets, which give the client certainty that their investment will pay off.

Fact is, most agencies and businesses today use a combination of measurements as they try to analyse the depth, resonance, importance and influence of the conversations they're part of. There's no one-size-fits-all model. It all depends on the objectives of the business or the campaign.

If your goal is awareness, for example, you'll be looking at metrics like target audience impressions, reach, volume, share of voice, frequency and prominence. For engagement, you'll be focusing more on key message penetration, social network followers, retweets, owned engagement and even event attendance. And so on.

In today's economic climate, few clients are prepared to pay for extensive surveys before and after a campaign to see whether real perception shifts have taken place. For now, it seems AVE will be around for a while yet.

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Founder & Director at Novus Group

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