

## Not your father's ruler

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### ABSTRACT

This book review examines *Measure What Matters: Online Tools for Understanding Customers, Social Media and Key Relationships* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011, 252 pages). The reviewer discusses the impact of author Katie Paine on the public relations measurement industry and the usefulness of her book for professional communicators looking to understanding the fast-changing world of social media.

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Ever wonder precisely what moment or person inadvertently set you on your career path? It might have been a patriarchal experience for measurement matriarch Katie Paine. Forty years ago Paine's father – Fortune Magazine editor Ralph Delahaye Paine – spoke at the Advertising Club of St. Louis. He asked attendees to consider why we can't determine the effectiveness of our communications though we can put a man on the moon. It is as if that challenge to attendees was directed personally to Paine, who has become arguably the most persistently visible and vocal proponent for the use of research and measurement in communications.

Via blog, newsletters, countless speeches, articles, and white papers, Paine has tirelessly and openly shared with practitioners war stories from decades of the trench-level measurement fight on both the client and vendor sides. With her new book, *Measure What Matters: Online Tools for Understanding Customers, Social Media, and Key Relationships*, Paine's latest share is our industry's gain. While it is essentially a "social mediafication" of her earlier 2007 book, *Measuring Public Relationships: The Data-Driven Communicator's Guide to Success*, it is a new and quite timely contribution to the field.

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Paine's style balances the theoretical with the practical—what Jim and Larissa Grunig quite rightly describe in their foreword as the ability to make the arcane readable. For example, while social media measurement material often bandies about such terms as “engagement” and “relationship-building,” Paine understands them and takes the extra step in applying Grunig's Relationship Index to provide a measurement system. The balance that the book strikes between theory and practice makes it very suitable for the PR practitioner attempting to understand social media measurement at both a conceptual as well as a practical, get-your-hands-dirty level.<sup>1</sup>

The book is divided into two parts. The first, entitled “Not Your Father's Ruler,” conveys the message that virtually everything is measurable but that one should focus on measuring only what matters. Paine discusses ways that practitioners can get started with seven simple steps. She also accompanies these steps with invaluable commentary on budgeting and choosing relevant methods, tools, and vendors. Part two, entitled “How to Measure What People Are Saying About You Online and Off,” offers more hands-on tactical advice. In this part, Paine reviews how to measure in social media, and how to obtain and use data to “get closer to customers,” before returning to an update of the familiar ground she covered in her 2007 book. Here, Paine — with relationships ever top of mind — centres on how to measure all points on the output to outcome spectrum while focusing primarily on stakeholder groups and secondarily on appropriate methods to measure the relationships with those groups.

Paine offers up the most profound insight of the book in the epilogue. Interestingly, this information is not new to this book, but something Paine herself predicted four years ago: “the future of public relations lies in the development of relationships, and the future of measurement lies in the accurate analysis of those relationships” (p. 217). This insight seems even more apropos now than in 2006 since social media have further underscored the importance of relationships and the need to measure those relationships in public relations.

Paine approaches social media measurement with the clear-eyed perspective of the professional PR practitioner. Having been there on both the client and practitioner side of the table, she easily highlights the challenges in approaching social media measurement, whether it has to do with internal silos, competition, politics, fear, budgets, selling measurement up the management food chain, understanding how to measure what practitioners can and can't

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<sup>1</sup> People interested in the topic but looking for something more technical may want to look at *Social Media Analytics: Effective Tools for Building, Interpreting, and Using Metrics* (Sponder, 2011), *Social Media ROI: Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts in Your Organization* (Blanchard, 2011), or *Social Media Metrics: How To Measure & Optimize Your Marketing Investment* (Sterne, 2010).

control, or how ultimately to best leverage one's results. In doing so, Paine provides a variety of checklists, outlines key steps, provides side bars, anecdotes and other materials, all aimed at leading the practitioner carefully and relatively painlessly to an end result.

There are, however, a few minor but notable gaps in the text. First, the book ignores measurement of the mobile space, which is growing in importance exponentially. Second, topical relevance is not discussed despite its importance in social media measurement material. A consideration of the authority of a poster or tweeter, for example, is often discussed in social media measurement material and Paine addresses this much better than most.

What is often missing in discussions of authority is topical relevance, and Paine's discussion of topical relevance is very limited. Let's look at an example: a tweeter might be deemed authoritative by most measures currently out there – most have to do with how connected one is, links, followers, citations, frequency, and the like. Let us take the example of Paine herself. There is no question Paine would be considered an authority given how connected she is and how frequently folks re-tweet her, for example. However, topical relevance can sometimes paint a different picture. The minute Paine might start blogging and tweeting about something that she is not an authority in, such as motorcycles, the topical value of her tweets declines. Kawasaki, however, would still deem her authoritative by connectivity.<sup>2</sup> Also important to authority is whether or not the tweeter or poster is an idea starter (source) or simply an idea spreader (spider). Neither of these themes are treated in Paine's analysis.

Methodologically, the book dwells substantially on content analysis despite conceding that content analysis is one of several tools used to evaluate social media. While there is a place for media content analysis in social media measurement, the nature of social media requires more sophisticated and different approaches – arguably as much a critique of the PR and social media measurement industry as the book itself.

If, as many would suggest, "content + community + conversation is the new communications," then we should look to better ways of measuring the nature of social media beyond simple counting or vanity metrics such as fans or followers. Paine tackles social media and provides workable solutions and approaches. This is a credit to the industry, but the book stops a half-yard short of the goal line by not exploring methodical approaches that, as social media develops, will likely hold the key to how we come to understand and analyze it – approaches that would include social network analysis and social capital as lenses through which to account for the dynamic and multidimensional nature of conversations and communities. In bridging the theoretical with the

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that I'm making an assumption here that Paine is not an authority on motorcycles.

practical, and writing for the PR practitioner, the book lacks a “what comes next” chapter that, given her experience in the field, would have been a real capstone to the text. Then again, maybe it is planned obsolescence, and we will eagerly await that chapter in her third book.

This book scores 4.75/5 rulers – but not your fathers’ rulers – and deserves a place on the bookshelf. Here’s hoping Paine keeps up the measurement fight and continues to share many war stories packaged in her characteristic not-too-hard, not-too-soft practitioner-friendly way.

## References

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