

# PR Agency Search Consultant Checklist: Questions to Ask Before You Hire



When it's time to hire a mid or senior level employee, companies use headhunters to conduct a search, vet candidates, coordinate interviews, conduct a background check, and help the hiring manager select the strongest person for the position.

Why go to all this effort? Because companies want to get the very best people. They want the recruiter to conduct a broad search, to shortlist the most qualified candidates, and use a proven process to evaluate the candidates' capabilities and fit, before making the decision to hire. And, of course, this all takes time, something busy executives simply don't have.

# Why Use An Agency Search Consultant When Hiring An Agency?



When you are ready to identify and hire a public relations/communications firm or consultant, you'll want to ensure you're getting the very best firm for your business. Since the agency will play a key role in building and managing your brand and reputation, this is one of the most important decisions companies make. You don't want to get it wrong. And, let's not forget that the budget may be equivalent to multiple employees.

As with recruiting for employees, getting expert help in the form of an agency search consultant or "agency headhunter," helps companies manage and navigate the search process to

select the best agency for the project. In the process, the business, communications, or marketing leaders responsible for the search save time and can remain focused on their day jobs.

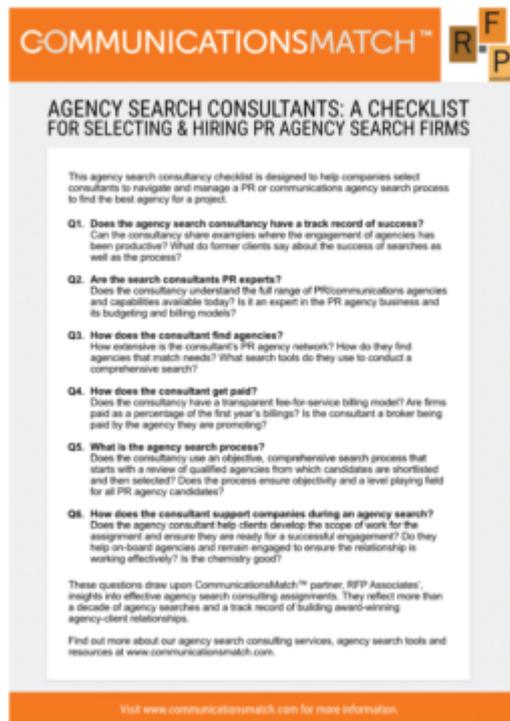
## Hiring an Agency Headhunter

The principal role of an agency search consultant is to help companies identify, evaluate and, ultimately, choose a public relations or communications firm with the expertise, capabilities, strategic approach and culture best-suited to the scope of work, the budget, and the communications and business goals of the client organization.

This is a significant responsibility. A successful relationship with an agency search consultant requires an effective partnership based on knowledge of the industry, search expertise and experience, the alignment of incentives, and a clear understanding of the client's business and goals.

Although a very limited group of agency search consultants have been working with clients to find PR agencies for many years – RFP Associates has a decade of experience – a growing number of consultants have been hanging out their singles. Consultants that have traditionally focused on advertising have added PR search to their offerings. As a result, there are a range of consultants to choose from with varying backgrounds, expertise, and business models.

To help companies find and select agency search partners, we've developed an [Agency Search Consultant Checklist](#) with questions to ask before engaging an agency search partner.



Here are some of the key considerations the checklist addresses:

## Experience & Track Record of Search Consultants

***Does the agency search consultancy have a track record of success?***

Agency search consultancies should be able to point to successful searches and productive client-agency relationships. Companies engaging a search consultant need to ask for references. When reviewing them, it's important to ask not only about the outcome of searches but about the process itself. Did the consultancy help achieve desired outcomes? Did the consultant work effectively with them? Would they hire the search consultancy again?

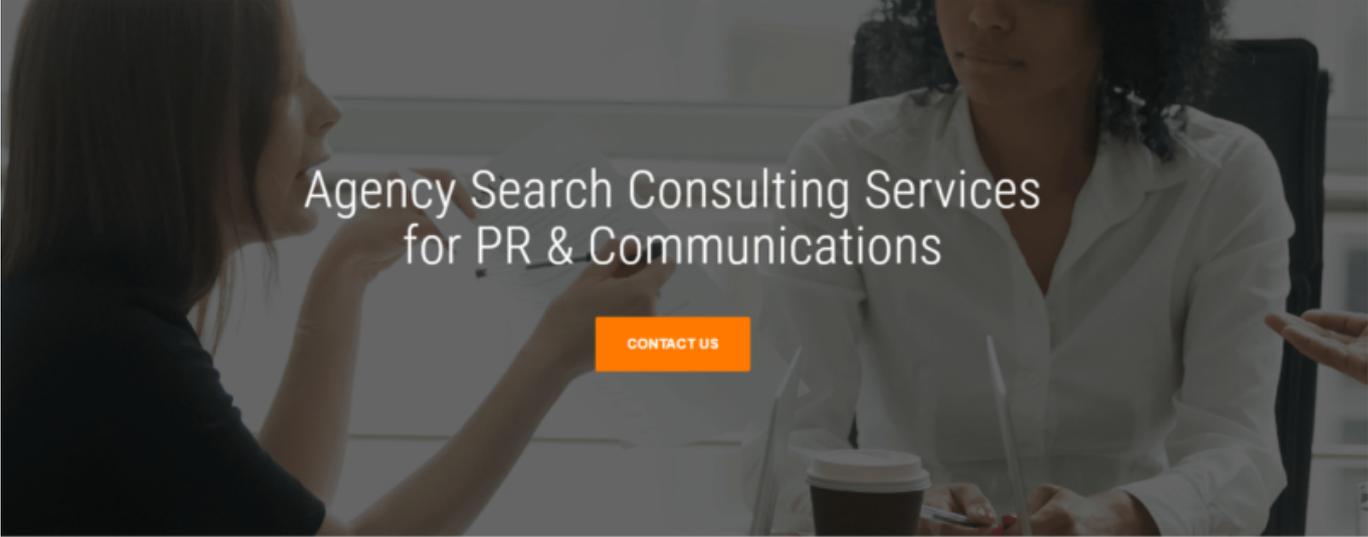
# Knowledge of PR Agencies and the Industry

*Are the search consultants PR experts?*

One issue that makes PR agency search and selection so challenging today is the sheer number and breadth of agency candidates. While there are large agencies with dozens of offices across the country and around the world, there are also hundreds of excellent mid-sized independents, boutique agencies, “virtual” firms, and individual consultants who might be a good fit.

An agency search consultancy should have a deep understanding of the practice of PR, how agencies operate, and how they bill for their time. Having industry knowledge and expertise is essential to help companies assess agencies and develop a scope of work with an appropriate budget.

## Agency Search Services – Network and Search Tools



## Agency Search Consulting Services for PR & Communications

[CONTACT US](#)

Looking to hire a communications or PR agency for a large or confidential project, our agency search consulting services delivered by RFP Associates can help. The structured approach to our communications and PR agency search services has led to award-winning agency-client relationships.  
Looking for developers and programmers? We can also help.

### ***How extensive is the search consultant's PR agency network and how do they find agencies that match needs?***

There are thousands of agencies and consultants that may be a great fit for clients. It's important that an agency search consultancy has the ability to conduct a comprehensive search to identify those with the industry experience and communications expertise that match each client's goals. The combination of search tools, extensive relationships, and being plugged into the industry, combined with technology-driven tools to engage firms, offers a powerful path to pulling together a focused shortlist of agencies that are qualified and a good fit.

## **Transparent Business Model**

### ***What is the business model for the agency search consultant? How do they get paid?***

Agency search consultants should work exclusively for the client on a fee-for-service basis. If they are paid as brokers

by agencies, and/or receive a portion of the first year's fee, consultants will be motivated to steer you toward a preferred agency based on compensation, or recommend agencies that are likely to charge the largest annual fees. And remember that consultants who are in fact brokers for agencies may not charge the client for the search, but that's because they receive compensation from the agency that has engaged them. The financial incentive is to sell you on who they represent, not the firm that's best for the assignment.

To avoid conflicts of interest, a search consultancy should be "agency-agnostic" and offer services and transparent pricing based on the search assignment – **your** search assignment.

## **Well-Defined Agency Search Process**

*What is the agency search process?*

The process a search consultancy uses to help you identify and hire a PR agency matters – a lot.

It should start with a comprehensive search for agencies with capabilities that match needs then detail how they will shortlist agencies and select firms for a request-for-proposal (RFP). It should map out the path to identifying finalists for presentations and selecting the agency best-suited for your business or organization. And, the process should be fair to candidate agencies – a level playing field is essential to uncovering the very best agency to meet your needs.

## **Agency Search Consultant Support Services & Chemistry**

*How do consultancies support companies during an agency search and what's their approach to working with clients?*



It's important to ask about the ways in which the agency search consultants will support and engage with your company during the search process. One issue to explore is whether they'll work with your company to define the scope of work and ensure that you are ready to start a search. Asking about the way the search consultancy supports clients to on-board agencies, and if they remain engaged to ensure agency-client relationships are working, will provide insights into whether the search consultants are transactional or relationship-oriented.

As with the engagement of agencies, a search consultant's fit with an organization is an important consideration. The agency search process, which can take as long as three months, will require on-going engagement and dialog between the company and search consultant to make sure it's as efficient and effective

as possible. While knowledge of an industry is a plus, it's essential to have a productive and collaborative working relationship.

Using these points as a guide when you're negotiating with or retaining the services of an agency search consultant will lead to a more effective and efficient search process. Most importantly, it will save you time and instill confidence that the PR agency you hire is best positioned to meet the specific communications needs of your business.

Find out more about our [agency search consulting services](#) or visit [www.CommunicationsMatch.com](http://www.CommunicationsMatch.com).

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## **About the Authors**

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*Locke developed and launched CommunicationsMatch, an agency search and engagement platform with 5,000 listed firms and professionals in 12 countries, to help companies find and engage agencies, consultants and freelancers that match needs. A founder of communications agencies and startups, he previously headed communications functions at Prudential Financial, Morgan Stanley and Deutsche Bank.*

**Steve Drake** and **Robert Udowitz** founded [RFP Associates](#) in 2011 after observing the agency selection process from "both sides of the aisle" and recognizing the need to streamline and improve the way searches are made and agencies selected from an honest, unbiased approach. Over the course of their careers Robert and Steve have worked at agencies, corporations, and trade associations in New York, Washington, and, for Steve, in Beijing, China, where he opened Fleishman-Hillard's first Asian office. In recent years they have also been sole practitioners for a variety of clients seeking media, crisis,

*and strategic counsel.*