

# Top PR Firms: Finding the Right Agency For Your Company

By Simon Erskine Locke, Founder & CEO, [CommunicationsMatch™](#)

Tens of thousands of companies start their search for PR agencies by searching for “Top PR Agencies,” “Top Financial PR Agencies,” “Top Pharmaceutical PR Agencies,” “Top Consumer PR Agencies,” etc. on Google. It’s a starting point for what can often be a time consuming, frustrating journey into the dark.

A search will throw up the names of a select few agencies, articles, associations and potential resources on the first page. Millions more references will follow on subsequent pages... but who goes beyond page one or two?

So, how can you be sure you’re getting a short list of the best outfits for the job? For a company that may not have hired an agency in the past or that has worked with consultants, too much information can be as unhelpful as too little.



In addition to using a communications focused search

engine like CommunicationsMatch, we've compiled a few tips to help you make the best choice possible in terms of a PR partnership.

1. Define your PR goals and available budget: Every agency search needs to start with a clear sense of what you want to achieve and how much you want to spend. If you don't know what your end goal is, you will waste your time, as well as the agencies' time. Writing up a brief is a powerful way to establish purpose and define the parameters for your search.
2. Decide what's important in the agency you are looking for: Industry sector experience, communications expertise, location and size may all be important, along with client relationships but prioritizing them will help foster a more successful relationship.

We'll now look at each of these in a little more depth.

- a. **Industry Expertise:** Larger agencies are likely to have extensive and often global practice areas that specialize in everything from financial to healthcare PR. The largest agencies including Edelman, Burson Marsteller, Ogilvy PR and Ketchum, for example, and large regional firms, work with Fortune 500 companies that require highly sophisticated large-scale campaigns. Mid-sized and smaller agencies tend to fall into two camps, "generalists" with capabilities across a range of industries and "specialists" in a particular niche. Professionals in these firms (who have often worked at large agencies) will bring to the table a high-level of industry-specific expertise and senior level engagement.
- b. **Areas of Communications Expertise:** Most PR agencies do far more than write press releases and secure media coverage (although in many cases this may be all a

client is looking for). Increasingly, agencies offer a full range of communications capabilities – including social media, content marketing, SEO and design. If you are looking for an integrated campaign choosing a firm that can do it all may well be the best choice. But if you are looking to build out your SEO program, you may be better served by engaging a consultant with that expertise.

- c. **Location:** Location is not as important as it once was – but communications is still a very personal business. Where an agency is based makes a difference if in-person meetings are important to you or if the cost of travel matters. Location may also impact media relationships. As a rule of thumb, agencies in a particular media market will know and have the best relationships in that market. For international programs – having international offices is important. Virtual agency networks – where firms work together across continents are increasingly common – but if international is a requirement, you'll need to know as much as possible about the network partners before you elect to work with them.
- d. **Size:** Size matters when it comes to scope of work and budgets. As a rule, larger firms will require more significant retainers than smaller firms, which tend to be more flexible. Some projects may require significant resources and others the engagement of an individual consultant.
- e. **Clients:** There's no doubt that the type of clients an agency is working for or has worked for is a powerful validation point. Additionally, if anyone on your agency team has once worked in a corporate communications role, that will certainly ensure they understand the process and internal challenges from a client's perspective. Recommendations and client references are useful in the selection process so it is highly recommended to solicit third party reviews when

going through this process.

- f. **People/Relationships:** When choosing an agency, the people who you will be working with matter – in fact the relationships can be the difference between a successful and failed engagement. That said, it's important to ensure there's substance, as well as chemistry. You will need both.

Having a clear sense of purpose and budget at the starting point of an agency search is essential to finding the right agency or consultants for your business. Using these selection guideposts will help you quickly identify the firm that best suits your needs.

As a final word, I'd like to add one more important point.

Keep your mind open and think-out-of-the-box when it comes to agency or consultant selection. In my corporate career, when we chose the firm or consultants we liked most – irrespective of size or brand reputation – we got the best results. Having a rigorous selection process and criteria will improve the efficiency of the process, but a spark of creative genius or a firm committed to delivering sweat equity to build a relationship may deliver the most powerful return and results.

Chances are you will know it when you see it.

CommunicationsMatch, which gives companies the ability to search more than 4,500 agencies and professionals by each of these criteria, is a powerful way to quickly short-list the firms that meet your needs in a few seconds. By simplifying the search process, it allows you to focus in on client experience, relationships and chemistry.

*About the Author: Simon Erskine Locke is Founder & CEO of [CommunicationsMatch™](#) a global communications-focused matching search engine. With more than 4,500 U.S. and*

*International agencies and professionals listed, it is a go-to resource for businesses seeking communications services providers with expertise in areas including: public relations, internal communications, government affairs, investor relations, content marketing, social media, SEO, website development, photography and video. Prior to founding CommunicationsMatch, Locke held senior Corporate Communications roles at Prudential Financial, Morgan Stanley and Deutsche Bank and founded communications consultancies.*