



Careers in Public Relations

A Guide to Opportunities in a Dynamic Industry



COUNCIL *of* PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

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Are you looking for...

Exciting, fulfilling and intellectually stimulating work?

Let us tell you about a day in the life of a public relations professional.

Fast track advancement?

Let us tell you about the many paths in one of the fastest growing career fields in the U.S.

Learning opportunities?

Let us tell you about the experience and business knowledge you will gain at a public relations firm.



We're looking for...

Bright graduates of top colleges, universities and business schools with strong communications skills.

Successful professionals in other careers who seek new challenges and fresh opportunities.

If this sounds like a good fit, read on
or visit us online at *www.prfirms.org*.



COUNCIL of PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

Public Relations Defined

HELPING AN ORGANIZATION tell its story, building good will and understanding, forging and nurturing strong bonds with the public and those who influence the public ... that's what public relations does.

Who is the public? The “public” could be anyone — or all — of the many groups that have a mutual stake in an organization’s future. Those stakeholders could be a company’s customers, distributors or suppliers. They usually are its employees and investors, but they also could be government officials who regulate the company’s industry and interest groups who seek greater regulation. A university’s stakeholders are its faculty, students and their families, its contributors, and its prospective students.

Who are influencers? “Influencers” are third parties who have an impact on stakeholders. For a university they could be high school teachers and guidance counselors. For a company they could be stock analysts who advise investors, union leaders who represent employees, customers and consultants who comment publicly on products and services, government officials and opinion leaders who affect public policy. The ultimate influencers are the media who report on and interpret an organization for stakeholders and third parties alike.

What’s the media’s role? Public relations seeks to earn the endorsement or support of respected third parties and to ensure the media presents the organization’s story accurately. Because there is no control over those endorsements and the media is independent in its reporting, successful public relations creates far more credibility than advertising. Very simply, advertising is purchased media; public relations is earned media.

Credibility is the ultimate PR goal. Credibility is why public relations plays such a valuable strategic role in today’s businesses and other organizations. And it is why public relations is such an intellectually challenging and professionally rewarding career.

Is PR a Good Fit for You?

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY offers many career opportunities with corporations, agencies or consultancies, not-for-profit organizations, the public sector and academia. The skills described below are necessary for a career in any one of these areas.

Writing, Writing, Writing ... and other Communications skills. The ability to write well is probably the most important of all public relations skills. You don't need to be a creative writer; rather you must be able to express yourself clearly, concisely and coherently. You'll be drafting business memos, news releases, fact sheets, interview guidelines, Web site content, speeches, brochures, newsletters and dozens of other kinds of written communications. Listening and speaking are also very important. You will be the eyes, ears and voice of your organization or your clients.

Relationship-focus. Whether we refer to publics, stakeholders, third-party influencers or the media, we're talking about people. Successful public relations professionals are curious about what motivates human behavior, they like to build relationships, and they enjoyed their humanities and social sciences courses.

Issues-oriented. Public relations professionals craft and execute campaigns for social issues like the war on drugs and smoking, and they sometimes help organizations take positions that are unpopular with some audiences. During major changes like company restructurings and mergers, and in times of crisis, public relations professionals are — like the Marines — the first in and the last out. Successful public relations professionals have the strong intellect, sense of urgency and cool-headedness to address the most complex situations under tremendous pressure. That's why former government officials, attorneys and management consultants thrive in public relations.

Strength of character. Public relations professionals are often the company's face to the outside world. Because their character becomes the most visible representation of their organizations' values and credibility, their integrity must be unquestioned. Often in the probing eye of the media, they have the personal courage to tell the truth, to avoid spin and evasiveness.

Throughout this book, there will be an emphasis on attracting the best and brightest to the public relations industry. That includes attracting a more diverse workforce, because having a wide variety of perspectives and talents in the workforce is imperative for doing business in today's highly competitive and increasingly global marketplace.

Entrepreneurial. A career at a public relations firm requires management skills for running accounts and counseling clients; in essence you will be running a business. At a public relations firm, virtually every successful professional is an entrepreneur. While you serve your clients, your time and efforts represent revenue for the firm; when you serve them well, you inevitably create new revenue sources from pleased clients. It doesn't take long for a capable professional to rise to managing an account, with responsibilities for controlling costs, building revenue, and contributing to the bottom-line profits of the firm. Whether managing an account, an office or an entire firm, business-savvy professionals will find the ideal entrepreneurial opportunity in the public relations industry.

“A public relations professional is part business manager, part sociologist, part cheerleader, part confessor and part pit bull. The trick to being successful is to be prepared for anything. And you can always count on the fact that tomorrow will bring new and exciting challenges.”

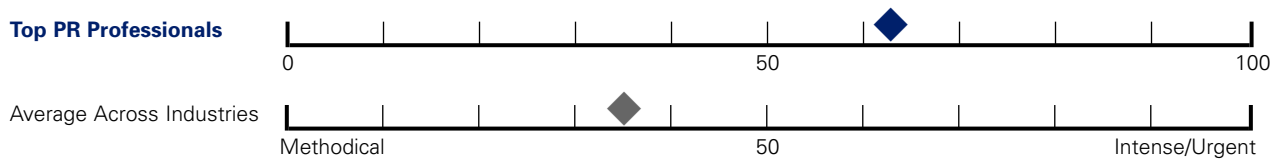
— SARA HARMS, Account Executive, Waggener Edstrom, New York



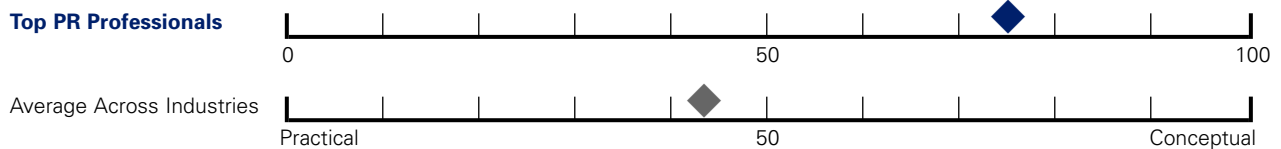
Test Yourself – Do you have what it takes?

RembrandtAdvantage®, an employment psychological testing firm, studied mid and senior level professionals at top public relations firms and compared them to a general population of business professionals. Results showed that high performing public relations professionals typically share three common traits: urgency, analytical problem solving and flexibility.

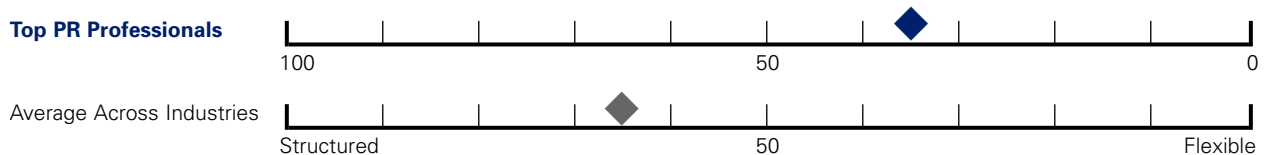
Urgency – The innate drive to generate a high volume of activity; to make things happen. Top public relations professionals tend to be almost twice as “urgent” as people in other industries.



Analytical Problem Solving – The ability to break from the norm and to “play the game of chess” — or look several moves ahead — when moving through issues and projects.



Flexibility – The ability to deal with both tasks and ideas, thriving in a dynamic environment and not “dogmatically” sticking to one’s views is critical to sustained success in this industry.



Compare yourself with successful public relations professionals

Are you “urgent”?

- Do you move through work faster than most people?
- Do you become restless when there is a lull in activity?
- Do you consider yourself more intense than most people?

Are you an “analytical problem solver?”

- Do complex games and puzzles hold your interest?
- Do you find that solutions to various problems come to you more easily than they do to other people?
- Do you instinctively want to address the root cause behind various issues/problems?

Are you “flexible” in your approach to work and interactions?

- When people’s views differ from yours, do you thoughtfully consider their perspective to see from where they are coming?
- Do you find that you can have many interruptions and can still complete the goals that you set for your day?
- Do shifts to your plans add to the excitement of your day?

If you answered “yes” to most or all of the statements above, then you may have what it takes to become a PR professional. Go to the Career Center on the Council’s Web site (prfirms.org/career) and take a diagnostic survey from RembrandtAdvantage that many PR firms find highly predictive.

Career Paths in a Public Relations Firm

THE DIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITIES at public relations firms creates a wide variety of paths for you to follow. They give you the chance to specialize or to experience a broad array of work challenges. All give you management responsibilities early in your career, and all provide excellent learning opportunities that will be invaluable, even if you eventually move to a different field or return to school for post-graduate studies.

The diversification or generalist track. Most agency professionals choose to work on a variety of assignments for clients in different industries. They find the variety of experiences to be the best learning opportunity and the most stimulating intellectual challenge. A generalist works with all stakeholders and influencers, whether they are employees or customers, interest groups or investors. They become experts in every type of media — TV, radio, print and Internet. Generalists are called on for all kinds of communications and research assignments — researching the competitors in a client’s industry, drafting a company brochure, preparing presentations at town meetings or tracking specific industry blogs. And generalists get to learn first hand the full range of global industries, from telecommunications to toys, energy to entertainment. Perhaps the greatest benefit of choosing a generalist track is the chance it provides to discover one’s special talents and interests and to guide you for future assignments in specialty fields or in agency management.

The hot specialties track. Some professionals prefer to focus right away in an area like high tech, healthcare or consumer products and services. You’ll find yourself becoming an authority on the issues of that field, getting to know personally its opinion leaders, analysts, bloggers and media, and understanding the business strategies and market dynamics of the industry and its companies. While you will be developing your professional skills by attending conferences and other educational forums, your greatest learning opportunity will be in working alongside bright, experienced colleagues in tackling challenging assignments for your clients.

If, for example, your interest is biology or health sciences, you could be helping a biotech company launching a new drug: training experts to be spokespeople; educating opinion leaders and groups with a special interest in the drug; obtaining FDA approval; building acceptance among physicians; educating patients about health management issues; and maintaining investor confidence in the company's strategy for the product.

Those in high-tech specialties find a similarly rich diversity of assignments as the Internet continues to create new opportunities for the practice of public relations. Clients cover the spectrum from major infrastructure companies like Cisco, Oracle and Microsoft to fledgling startups hoping to be the next Google or eBay. Newer Internet platforms — blogging, podcasts and wikis, to name a few — have added to the tools that PR pros need to understand and master. Whatever the specialty, you will be communicating and establishing relationships with the trusted opinion leaders, analysts and media that cover those fields.

Perhaps the world of consumer products and services is what captivates your interest. Two popular and growing sectors in PR are fashion and sports marketing. Although the two are seemingly on opposite ends of the consumer spectrum, you will find that many of the skills required to succeed are similar. High profile clients — whether a major designer or a professional sports franchise — will draw upon your skills to promote their interests to their respective stakeholders in a variety of ways.

Skilled specialists have an important role in most public relations firms, providing vital support to clients in many different ways. Event planners, for example, are indispensable when it comes time to organize and manage a client's event. Their talents might be applied to produce a modest ribbon-cutting ceremony or a global event such as the Olympics or the Academy Awards. When a client's CEO is addressing



“Tremendous opportunities exist for people looking to gain experience that comes from working with a cross-section of clients on a variety of timely issues.”

— JAYA BHUMITRA, Associate, APCO Worldwide

shareholders or accepting an award, a talented speechwriter is often called upon to capture the speaker's voice and write the words he or she will use. And as measuring the return on investment of marketing programs becomes ever critical to clients, research professionals have become integral in the program planning and evaluating process. These highly specialized professionals may work on several accounts, developing and refining innovative methods for measuring public relations programs.

Management. All career paths — whether they are for specialists or generalists — offer increasing opportunities to manage and lead. After a few years as an account executive, you may be promoted to an account supervisor, with full responsibility for the relationship with a client, leading the account staff, providing services, directing the work of other U.S. and international offices supporting the client and managing the P&L (profit and loss) of the account. Mid-career transfers from other fields will usually take on those supervisory responsibilities as soon as they feel they are ready.

Having proven yourself to be a good account supervisor, you'll be ready for more leadership challenges at your agency. The next step is leading a group of accounts, often with a focus on a particular industry. In this role you will be responsible for balancing staff time among several clients, developing a knowledge base on the industries of your clients and developing new business for your group.

Successful group directors usually progress to become practice directors or general managers. Practice directors help build the firm's competency in a particular specialty or industry area. Serving as the firm's resident experts in their specialties, they guide research, build databases, share knowledge among offices, participate in new business efforts and train staff professionals. General managers have a geographical responsibility, managing the firm's operations in a particular city or region. While working with practice directors to ensure high quality client service and well-trained staff, they direct new business development and manage the staff and administration of the operation. Thus they are accountable for two vital elements of the bottom line: generating revenue and managing costs.

Serving as a practice director or general manager prepares one to become the president or CEO of a firm. Those leaders manage agencies that range in size from a one-office firm with a million dollars in annual revenue to an international agency in dozens of countries with revenues of over \$100 million. In some cases CEOs are the owners of their companies, in others they are leading firms that are parts of companies traded on the stock market. Those who do not choose to take on those kinds of major leadership responsibilities of public relations firms become senior counselors, usually working on major assignments for the firm's clients. A senior counselor may advise a multibillion-dollar corporation on an

acquisition of a company in another country, help a Fortune 500 company deal with a high-profile crisis or help a new CEO take over his or her responsibilities. Whatever career path one takes, you will develop the ability to help clients solve fundamental business problems and develop the management skills to succeed in business.

Corporate vs. PR Firm. “What is the difference between working at a firm and working in PR within a corporate environment?” That is one of the most common questions asked among people considering a career in public relations. While there are many common skills required in the two areas — as well as a significant amount of exchange of talent between the two areas — there are some differences, including:

Corporate	PR Firm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One client • Staff: Responsible to provide advice and support to line managers • Involved from start to finish • “Corporate” environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple clients • Line: Responsible for firm’s primary objectives; contribute to firm’s growth • Long-term, project or retainer work • Entrepreneurial environment

A Day in the Life

THERE IS NO TYPICAL DAY for public relations professionals working at America's leading PR firms. The diversity of clients, issues and communications strategies are limitless. But there are some activities that all new public relations professionals undertake, depending on whether they are just beginning their career or they have transferred from another field.

If you are beginning your career, you'll be learning about your clients' businesses and the issues they face. You'll be finding out what's on the minds of their stakeholders by reading, attending industry conferences and doing research on the views of opinion leaders. You'll also be spending lots of time getting to know the reporters who follow your clients' businesses. Once you have that grounding, you'll help your client communicate with those stakeholders, the media and opinion leaders.

In a world of media clutter, you will find it challenging to communicate successfully. Gaining the attention and understanding of inundated audiences — customers, employees, and shareholders — will test your creativity and strategic insights. Skeptical reporters who need to be convinced of your point of view will challenge your persistence and persuasiveness. You'll need to build their trust, assure them you'll be straight with them, and cultivate relationships by providing ideas, data and sources for their stories. The payoff will be the thrill of seeing your stories in the national press or on the evening news.

Those who enter public relations from another career field will encounter many of the same challenges. But, they will also often find themselves putting past experience to work on behalf of their clients. Former lawyers often work in crisis public relations, helping clients defend themselves in the court of public opinion. Former management consultants work on corporate change assignments, communicating with the many stakeholders affected by a merger or restructuring of a company. Former advertising and marketing executives often seek out projects using public relations to reach customers and business partners, an increasingly important role of public relations in the Internet age.

Because teaching, mentoring and editing are important functions of a public relations firm manager, former academics do well in public relations firm leadership roles.

A Young Professional's Day

Background: 4.5 years experience

Education: B.A. (Communications major, Psychology minor)

Position: Senior Account Executive, New York office of a global strategic communications organization

Clients: Large public technology organization, a global provider of enterprise search software, global managed security services provider (MSSP)

- 8:30 a.m.** Scan headlines online in major daily newspapers, read industry blogs and technology trade publications, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and *CNET News.com*. Read any relevant articles or major news stories and discuss with colleagues.
- 9:00 a.m.** Read and respond to e-mail. Outline the day's priorities.
- 9:30 a.m.** Participate in conference call with enterprise search client to discuss product launch activities and a messaging document.
- 10:00 a.m.** Receive details about new computer virus outbreak. Draft media pitch and begin outreach to targets. Send report of interview opportunities to MSSP client and secure spokesperson availability. Work with team members to develop briefing notes for spokesperson.
- 10:30 a.m.** Field inbound media inquiry about virus outbreak. Answer reporter's questions and report back to internal team.
- 11:00 a.m.** Participate in customer briefing for enterprise search client, during which a new user reference is interviewed about the installation and benefits. Take detailed notes to later draft a press release.
- 11:30 a.m.** Answer call from client at technology organization. Switch gears and run through status updates for upcoming campaign.
- 12:00 p.m.** Lunch meeting to discuss new business prospects.
- 12:30 p.m.** Return calls from reporters: *CNET News.com* needs answers to questions via email regarding the computer virus; *InformationWeek* will take an interview if we can produce a user reference.
- 1:00 p.m.** Draft responses to *CNET News.com* questions and send to MSSP client for review before finalizing content with the reporter.
- 2:00 p.m.** Incorporate manager's feedback on launch targets and pitch media for enterprise search client. Research additional media targets.
- 3:00 p.m.** Work with account coordinator to scan for resulting coverage of computer virus outbreak.
- 4:00 p.m.** Conference call with marketing team at technology organization regarding upcoming campaign. Provide PR updates on call and answer questions. Send detailed recap to client.
- 5:00 p.m.** Follow-up with MSSP client to ensure reporter's questions are answered. Call back *InformationWeek* and let reporter know we don't have a user reference.
- 5:15 p.m.** Review notes from customer briefing and begin outline of press release for enterprise search client.

A Vice President's Day

Background: 14 years public relations experience; formerly worked in entertainment industry

Education: B.A. in Political Science

Position: Vice President at a Los Angeles-based national firm

Clients: National health insurance plan, state environmental regulatory agency, regional railway agency, national healthcare provider

- 8:30 a.m.** Monitor local/national media, forward new research study on California's uninsured issue to client, review/return e-mails and calls.
- 9:00 a.m.** Review various documents submitted by team members, including script for B-roll shoot and draft Web site schematics for education campaign.
- 10:00 a.m.** Meet with client regarding national Medicare product rollout and PR integration plans with advertising and marketing partners.
- 11:30 a.m.** Monitor web cast on costs/trends related to employer-sponsored healthcare.
- 12:00 p.m.** Attend creative brainstorming session regarding pro bono museum client and site groundbreaking event.
- 1:30 p.m.** Participate in agency community involvement meeting to recommend philanthropic response to recent hurricane and discuss counsel in client contributions/response.
- 2:30 p.m.** Review client testimony for upcoming healthcare regulatory hearing; discuss talking points and potential Q&A with spokespersons in preparation for media inquiries.
- 4:00 p.m.** Review potential new business contacts to pursue, assign competitive intelligence and national healthcare research. Review and approve client billing, meet with team supervisor to discuss staff and profitability projections.
- 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.** Lead rehearsal for tomorrow's new business presentation to a university hospital and medical center facilities.



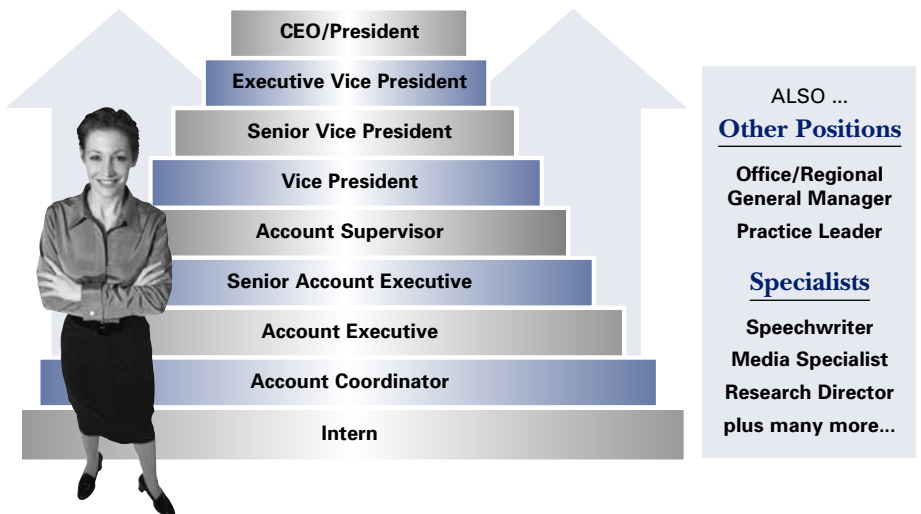
Salaries, Promotions and Quality of Life

ENTRY-LEVEL SALARIES in public relations firms may range from \$28,000 to \$35,000, depending on location and specialty. Professionals transferring from other fields will generally match or raise their former salaries. They will also find advanced benefits, investment programs, training and development and tuition reimbursement opportunities. Public relations firms are generous with benefits, quality-of-life enhancements and incentive packages.

The biggest advantage of public relations firms over other fields is the opportunity to move up quickly in a field wide-open for advancement opportunities. Success is readily apparent; quality work and satisfied clients usually result in additional business for agencies, as well as promotions and salary increases for the account teams. There are opportunities to travel and even to apply for transfer to other cities or countries. Public relations has become far more global, with many account teams consisting of professionals in more than a dozen countries. Quality of life is a high priority in public relations agencies.

Steps along the Career Path.

A career path at a public relations firm will often vary depending on the type of firm, its size and location. A typical career progression through a PR firm might look something like the diagram on the right (although titles may vary).



Internships. Having an internship at a PR firm is a smart way to land your first job. Most firms offer internship programs throughout the year, giving candidates ample opportunities to experience what a career would be like working in a collaborative, fast-paced environment. Internships also provide such essential job-hunting elements as:

- **Developing a portfolio:** The opportunity to develop materials you can showcase to prospective employers such as press releases and brochures, as well as demonstrate success on client projects.
- **Cultivating a network:** Forging relationships and future job references with account team members, fellow interns, human resources and clients is something you should do throughout your career.
- **Industry/sector education:** Learning about various sectors of business, from technology to entertainment to financial services will give you a leg up on the competition.

The profiles below represent a composite of a typical job description for account executive, account supervisor and senior vice president, including approximate years of experience, salary ranges and skills and responsibilities expected for each position:

<u>Account Executive</u>	<u>Account Supervisor</u>	<u>Senior Vice President</u>
Years experience: 2–5	Years experience: 5–10	Years experience: 10-plus
Salary range: \$35,000– \$50,000, plus other benefits	Salary range: \$55,000–\$85,000, plus other benefits	Salary range: \$120,000 – \$175,000, plus other benefits
Team dynamic: Manage account coordinators; report to account supervisor, vice president	Team dynamic: Manage team of account executives, coordinators; report to group heads, SVP, VP.	Team dynamic: Manage teams; report to CEO; part of firm’s executive team
Most important skills/responsibilities:	Most important skills/responsibilities:	Most important skills/responsibilities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Proficient in spelling, grammar; draft and edit press releases; involved in significant written client correspondence • Client Service: Often have day-to-day contact with clients; manage client budgets • Administrative: Involved in basic operation functions of the firm including time sheets, client budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Write and edit persuasive copy; draft business plans, program plans for clients • Client Service: Lead account work for large firm clients • Administrative: Responsible for managing client budgets; manage staff time • New Business: Generate new business leads and grow existing client business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership: Visible in the business community • Staff Responsibilities: Manage internal training and development programs; hire and promote staff • Client Service: Provide senior counsel for select clients; manage client budgets • Administrative: Oversee and maintain profitability of group(s) within firm • New Business: Drive agency growth and development

No matter where you are on the career ladder, working at a public relations firm can be an enriching and rewarding experience. You’ll have the satisfaction of helping clients in their time of need, and you’ll be learning and developing business skills that will help you throughout your career. You’ll be part of a profession that addresses virtually every serious issue in business and society today, and you’ll be preparing yourself to shape the issues of tomorrow.

Working with world-class companies and famous brands in every industry, in good times and bad, you’ll be building valuable business credentials and personal confidence.

Taking the Next Step

IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ, and are interested in joining a public relations firm, just visit the Council of Public Relations Firms Web site at www.prfirms.org

On the site, at Find-a-PR Firm, you can search a list of 100 leading public relations firms by size, location and specialty. The directory provides "hints" for prospective employees and allows you to develop automatically a short list of candidate firms. You can also hyperlink to each firm's home page or send an email to the firm's recruiting officer. At the Career Resources section of the Web site you can fill out an application and post your resume for review by all Council member firms. You can also find more information to prepare yourself for your first interview. And, finally, if you have any further questions, with one click you can send an email to a Council staff member.

“Public relations is about more than media,
it is about communications that requires input from a wide variety
of professional disciplines in order to be effective.”

— MARK SENAK, Senior Vice President, Fleishman-Hillard, Washington, D.C.
Practiced law and wrote three books before beginning career in public relations

The Council of Public Relations Firms

The Council is dedicated to strengthening the recognition and role of public relations firms in corporate strategy, business performance and social education, serving as an authoritative source of information and expert comment and helping set standards for the public relations industry. For more information about the Council of Public Relations Firms, call 1-877-PRFIRMS or visit our Web site at www.prfirms.org.



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