



Finding Your Perfect PR Agency Match

Choosing a PR firm that is the right fit for your company – in terms of size, as well as experience – is crucial to the success of your PR program. Selecting a firm that is too large may mean higher fees, less attention and fewer results, while selecting a firm that is too small that can't execute your program can doom you to inconsistent effort, stress and criticism.

To determine your true needs, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What is my PR budget going to be?** You need to agree on a number (or at least a range) to help define the size and scope of your effort.
- **What am I trying to accomplish?** This will help you define the types of talent and experience you'll need from your agency.
- **What PR firm capabilities will be most important to me?** If most of the work you need is media relations, press release development and speech support, the fact that the agency has an impressive digital marketing department may not add much value for you.

Once you've outlined your needs, you are better prepared to meet with potential PR agency matches. Seven key questions to ask your agency candidates include:

1. **How big is your staff?** For some clients, the proverbial one-man band works well, until that one man – or woman – gets sick, goes on vacation or decides to take another job. For many companies, a smaller agency with multiple staff members can offer the expertise, scale of economy and flexibility they need, without adding unnecessary overhead.
2. **What kind of resources/infrastructure do you have in place?** It's important to know that the agency is large enough to have the resources in-house to get the job done efficiently and effectively. This would include back-office capabilities, such as a consistent billing/budget tracking system, IT infrastructure, online media directories and compatible software, as well as a full-time staff and a record of financial stability.

3. **What's your firm's focus?** If the firm offers PR, advertising and marketing communications in-house, you have to decide if you want a jack-of-all-trades or a specialist. If you're looking specifically for PR and media relations, why pay for the overhead of the agency's artist or web designer that you aren't using? A good PR firm has relationships with other specialists and can help you find the right art studio or web design firm to fit your needs and budget, without burdening you with the overhead ... or the limited style/capabilities of the in-house guy.
4. **How long have you been in business?** Lots of small PR shops pop up when times get tough and former corporate PR people retire early and decide to become PR consultants. While such executives offer interesting experience, you want to make sure that their agency business is not just a stop-gap measure to sustain them until the next corporate job comes along. You want to deal with a PR firm principal that has a solid, stable track record. Ask your peers and the reporters who cover your industry for recommendations.
5. **Who are your other clients?** You want to make sure that they have experience in your industry and in your product/service segment, but that they do not work for any of your direct competitors. If your work is business-to-business and most of their clients' work is business-to-consumer, you may want to probe a little deeper to make sure they understand the trends and issues that affect your business specifically.
6. **How will my budget rank among those of your other clients?** If your budget is substantially smaller than most of the agency's clients, you may not get all the attention you want or deserve. Conversely, if you will be their largest client, they may not have the infrastructure or capacity to adequately handle your work.
7. **Who will be on my account team?** It's important to know who the core members on your account will be and what their roles will be. While you want senior attention, you don't want to waste your budget having the president of the firm handle even the lowest level tasks. A good agency will maximize the impact of your budget by assigning different tasks to different staffer members at the appropriate level.

Once you've obtained answers to these questions, you'll be able to make a more informed and more objective decision. Before deciding, though, ask yourself one final question: How's the chemistry with the firm's personnel? Make sure they have the energy level and the enthusiasm you're looking for and, ultimately, that you will enjoy working with them.