

Agency Search Trends Report: January 2026



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CONNECTING COMPANIES WITH COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS

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Executive Summary

A January 2026 Gemini analysis of Google search and trends data shows search intent for PR and communications agencies shifting with outcome-based metrics as a priority and Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) capabilities in demand.

The data show corporates are searching for partners who can prove immediate ROI and visibility within AI-driven search results.

It should not be a surprise to see searches for firms with AI capabilities increasing significantly given the rapid adoption of the technology. Search volume for "AI PR agency" increased by 35% month over month, while demand for traditional "media relations" remained flat.

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Overall Search Volume Trends

Although we did not necessarily anticipate significant differences month-over-month or year-over-year in search volume for core terms, our analysis reveals modestly rising search volume for “PR Agencies,” and big jumps in all other categories between 2025 and 2026 data.

The most significant change between December and January 2026 is the uptick in demand for crisis communications. Increased interest in communications consultants would seem to reflect general trends toward boutique firms, which is reflected in CommunicationsMatch™’s comparative reference data.

While the use of “PR Agency” as a search term sees a modest increase, when combined with more specialized search terms, overall demand for public relations expertise is higher. The only category down over the previous month is internal communications agencies, but compared to a year ago search volume is higher.

Metric	Search Volume (Jan '26)	MoM Change	YoY Change
“PR Agency”	High	+5%	+2%
“Communications Consultant”	Moderate	+12%	+8%
“Internal Comms Agency”	Moderate	-2%	+15%
“Crisis Communications Firm”	Moderate	+18%	+5%

The search data in this table reflects aggregate search intent based on proprietary search criteria using Gemini to analyze U.S. search data.

Top 10 Most Searched Agencies (Overall)

The report prompt parameters are structured to reveal search intent rather than the volume that may also be impacted by news coverage. These firms received the highest search volume based on this metric. In CommunicationsMatch™’s own data, each of the following firms are regularly among the top-ranked reflecting the broader search trends the data reveal.

1. Edelman (Global Infrastructure, Trust Barometer)
2. 5W Public Relations (Integrated PR, Consumer B2B)
3. Real Chemistry (Healthcare data-driven PR)
4. Interdependence (AI-powered integrated comms)

5. FINN Partners (Mid-sized, specialized sectors)
6. Ruder Finn (Global, tech/corporate focus)
7. APCO (Public affairs, corporate crisis)
8. Zeno Group (Digital-first storytelling)
9. MikeWorldWide (Consumer & B2B integration)
10. Highwire PR (Technology focus)

Sector-Specific Leaderboard (Top 5)

As part of our Gemini research process, we tracked the top 5 firms that generated the most searches related to particular industry categories.

Sector	Agency 1	Agency 2	Agency 3	Agency 4	Agency 5
Consumer Products	5WPR	Zeno Group	Edelman	Hunter	Coyne PR
Healthcare	Real Chemistry	IPG Health	Finn Partners	JPA Health	Spectrum
Financial Services	Edelman Smithfield	Vested	Gregory	Avenue Z	Caliber Corp
Technology	Highwire PR	Bospar	LaunchSquad	Interdependence	PAN
AI	Interdependence	Avenue Z	Bospar	Ruder Finn	Big Fish PR
Professional Services	APCO	Weber Shandwick	Edelman	Bliss Group	Inkhause

Agency Size Search Trends

The data shows leading search drivers for different sized agencies and the top trending firms in these categories.

Size	Primary Search Drivers	Top Trending Firms
Mid-sized	"Integrated campaigns," "B2B visibility," "Sector expertise"	FINN Partners, MikeWorldWide, PAN
Boutique	"Crisis consulting," "GEO experts," "Founder branding"	Big Fish PR, Channel V Media, 10 to 1 PR

Demand Signals & Gaps

We asked Gemini to analyze and report on high-demand phrases that may indicate emerging market demand. Generative engine optimization expertise, disinformation crisis consulting, and interest in boosting executive profiles bubbled to the top of areas of focus.

Specifically, the research revealed:

- GEO for PR: High search volume specifically looking for firms that optimize content for AI citations (ChatGPT, Perplexity).
- Disinformation Crisis Consultant: Spike in demand related to managing deepfakes and automated narrative attacks.
- Founder-led Brand Agency: High interest in PR to boost executive profiles rather than just company profiles.

Value-Based Category Definitions

As part of the research process, the following emerged as important in client searches for agencies.

- Outcome-based: Search intent focused on tangible business metrics, such as lead generation, direct traffic referrals, and citations within generative AI answers.
- Authority-based: Search intent focused on executive thought leadership, niche industry visibility, and building long-term credibility among specific stakeholders.
- Visibility-based: Search intent focused on traditional media placements, press release distribution, and broad brand awareness metrics.

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Methodology

CommunicationsMatch™'s research team used a proprietary structured research prompt built and tested to analyze search data and uncover search trends based on actual searches conducted on Google and other sources for the period Jan 1-31, 2026. The research findings are based on an analysis of the data, consistent with our strict search requirements to use primary sources, double check the results, and avoid hallucinations.

As a complementary source we reviewed comparative data from CommunicationsMatch's monthly search trends data for searches conducted on the platform for agencies and communications professionals based on areas of expertise and agency size. Although, our data does not represent the broad universe of searches conducted on Google, it validates the search results.

If you are interested in more narrowly-focused reports, the CommunicationsMatch™ research team is happy to assist with the generation of research using our AI tools to evaluate search for specific clients or industries and recommend action steps to support agency new business or corporate communications searches.

Although this research has been conducted using best practices and is consistent with insights from search trends we are seeing on CommunicationsMatch™, this report should only be used as an indicator of industry search trends. We are not responsible for inaccuracies or liability for the use of the data.

Contact us at support@communicationsmatch.com if you have questions or projects we can support.

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