

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Simon Erskine Locke  
[slocke@communicationsmatch.com](mailto:slocke@communicationsmatch.com)  
Tel: +1 (917) 359-6969  
Robert Udowitz  
[rudowitz@rfpassociates.net](mailto:rudowitz@rfpassociates.net)  
Tel: +1 (703) 966-7236

### **How Communications Executives Identify & Hire PR Agencies: Insights & Takeaways for Companies & their Agencies**

**Interim Results of PR Agency Search & Hiring Survey Presented at  
The Institute for Public Relations Research Bridge Conference**

---

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 11, 2019 – Corporate communications and marketing leaders who hire public relations and other communications agencies overwhelmingly rely on their knowledge and experience, and the word-of-mouth of peers, when selecting and hiring agencies. The interim results of a new survey of agency search and hiring practices by large companies and non-profits show 64 percent of respondents citing word-of-mouth and 70 percent relying on their industry knowledge in the process of finding, evaluating and selecting among candidate agencies.

[The 2019 Agency Search and Hiring Survey](#) was conducted by CommunicationsMatch™ and RFP Associates, in collaboration with Researchscape International. The findings were presented today at the Institute for Public Relations Research's second annual [Bridge Conference in Washington, D.C.](#)

-more-

Primarily representing Fortune 1,000 companies and large non-profit organizations, most respondents work with multiple agencies -- with one-third working with more than four agencies. Of the respondents to date, nearly equal numbers said their most significant (primary) agency relationship is with a large, holding company-owned agency (29 percent); a mid-sized independent agency (28 percent); or a small/boutique independent firm (26 percent). More than 27 percent of communications executives said the budget for their primary agency relationship is in excess of \$1 million annually.

More than two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) said they use an RFP as part of the process of hiring agencies, with about 4 in 10 (42 percent) indicating they involve their procurement department in the process. About a third (32 percent) reported working with their marketing department when choosing communications agencies. Respondents' top two criteria during the agency selection process: "Understanding of organization's communications needs," and "quality of strategic thinking, program ideas, and recommendations."

"The survey shows more than two-thirds of organizations are satisfied with their agency search processes and the agencies they have hired, with most saying they'd recommend their agencies to others," said Robert Udowitz and Steve Drake, Principals of RFP Associates. "At the same time, the results clearly reveal shortfalls and disconnects in the hiring process and companies' experience working with agencies, which we believe offer communications executives, as well as agencies, insights into ways in which the process can be improved to drive better outcomes."

Udowitz and Drake pointed out that when it comes to identifying agency candidates, some two-thirds of respondents said they started with just two to five agencies. And while most utilize RFPs, only about half include detailed selection criteria or agency budgets in their RFPs. Despite satisfaction with their overall agency search process, consistently, about 40 to 50 percent of respondents indicated that they were moderately or only slightly satisfied with specific components of that process, including the RFP itself; the time taken to identify agencies; resources to find agencies; and the number of agencies considered. Respondents who had previously worked for agencies were significantly less satisfied with their agency search and hiring methods, than those who had not.

The survey highlights some specific considerations for agencies in the search process. Almost 40 percent of respondents felt that agency responses in the search process were “boilerplate,” and 33 percent said they perceived agency candidates to be “upselling” during the evaluation process. Of those who shared a perspective about the RFP process, 19 percent noted that responses were off-base or not consistent with the scope of work, and 17 percent that budgets or staffing did not mesh with the required work.

“Although additional research will be required to determine whether or not the perception of boilerplate responses and upselling are potentially the result of a lack of clarity in the RFP process or simply a certain degree of jadedness with the agency hiring process, it’s clear that some clients perceive agencies to be falling short in these areas,” said Simon Erskine Locke, Founder & CEO of CommunicationsMatch. “The self-reliance of communications leaders on their experience and word of mouth in the search process, and the finding that many companies feel they aren’t seeing enough candidates, is significant. There is clearly room to improve the RFP and search process.”

Overall, respondents were less satisfied the more they were spending and the larger their agency. The results show the keys to client satisfaction are agency proactivity, effective account coordination, staff stability, meeting objectives, operating within budgets, and meeting deadlines.

The final results and full survey report will be released in May. Interim results discussed during the IPR Bridge Conference are based on 101 survey responses (53 complete, 48 partial) as of March 25. The online survey was issued to communications officers and executives at Fortune 1,000 companies and large non-profit organizations beginning February 25, and data will be collected through April 12, 2019.

CommunicationsMatch’s agency search, hiring tools and resources save companies time, achieve better search outcomes and build stronger brands. With 5,000 agency and individual profiles, companies search for communications partners by location, size, clients, keywords, ownership, designations, diversity and more. CommunicationsMatch also offers agency search consulting, communications research tools, as well as programmer & developer search. Find out more at: [www.communicationsmatch.com](http://www.communicationsmatch.com).

[RFP Associates, LLC](#) is a communications agency search firm that has developed a specialized search and selection methodology that improves the process of identifying, evaluating and hiring agencies. For more than a decade, the company has worked with corporations and associations to engage agencies for agency-of-record assignments and confidential projects.

[Researchscape](#) International is an agile market research consultancy delivering high-quality custom and omnibus surveys, automated reporting tools as well as other research-related services, to marketers and agencies. Its surveys are frequently used to drive thought leadership, support content creation and help grow organizations' public profiles. Other services support specific client needs including concept testing, feature prioritization, crisis communications, customer satisfaction and more.

# # #