

2009 Digital Readiness Report

# Essential Online Public Relations and Marketing Skills



KORN/FERRY INTERNATIONAL



# Table of Contents

03	Opening Letter
04	Digital Readiness Survey Description
06	Key Insights
12	Conclusions

## The Research Fellows

Eric Schwartzman, [iPressroom](#)  
Tom Smith, [Trend Stream](#)  
Don Spetner, [Korn/Ferry International](#)  
Barbara McDonald, [Public Relations Society of America](#)

## Licensed Under Creative Commons



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Dear Communications Professional,

After training hundreds of executives on why, how and when to use social media for organizational communications, and deploying **online newsrooms** through iPressroom for major clients including **Target**, **Toyota**, **UCLA** and others, the one question repeatedly asked which could never be answered by one research study has always been which online communications channels are most important? Which ones should organizations deploy first? And which ones are critical for employees to learn to use to do their jobs effectively in a networked world?

With social media researcher **Tom Smith**, author of “**When Did We Start Trusting Strangers [PDF]**,” **Korn Ferry International** CMO Don Spetner and **Public Relations Society of America** VP Marketing Barbara McDonald, it is my distinct honour to share with you the 2009 Digital Readiness Report.

In it you will find the most current, comprehensive data ever assembled on the specific new media and social media communications skills employers want and prospective new hires need in today’s competitive public relations and marketing job markets.

In addition to providing the first social media and new media channel rankings by adoption rate, importance and type of organization, the study also indicates the broader trends concerning which branch of the organization is winning the right to lead in the use of digital communications in the workplace.

If you’re searching for current data on how organizations are integrating new media and social media into their organizational hierarchy or looking to update your online communications skills as a public relations or marketing professional, we hope you find this information useful.

The majority of our sample is comprised of communications and HR professionals with hiring responsibility who have either added a new public relations or marketing staff member within the last 12 months, or who plan to do so within the next 12 months.

Our key findings are in this report. But if you’d like additional information, or access to the panel discussion of our findings, please visit <http://www.ipressroom.com/readiness>.

Sincerely,

Eric Schwartzman  
Founder, iPressroom  
[@eric schwartzman](#)

## Digital Readiness Survey Description

The 2009 Digital Readiness Report is intended to help public relations, corporate communications and marketing professionals better understand and appreciate how organizations are integrating online communications into their business practices.

Over the course of a 6-week period during spring 2009, we surveyed 278 public relations, marketing and human resources professionals to identify trends regarding their approach to social media.

Our objective was to capture unbiased, quantitative insights on the impact of these emerging channels on organizational communications, both in terms of what activities are being employed and what skill-sets communications professionals need in today's

job market. Our report covers US-based organizations of varying size and type.

The survey was conducted online via self completion questionnaires, which were designed to provide quantitative data that allows the statistical comparison of trends and attitudes among key segments. Respondents were recruited through iPressroom, Korn/Ferry International and PRSA, providing an accurate cross-section of professionals in the public relations and marketing category in the US. They were profiled and questioned on their involvement in job hiring to ensure that the sample captured a large proportion of decision makers in regards to recruitment.

### Which of the following best describes your current organization?

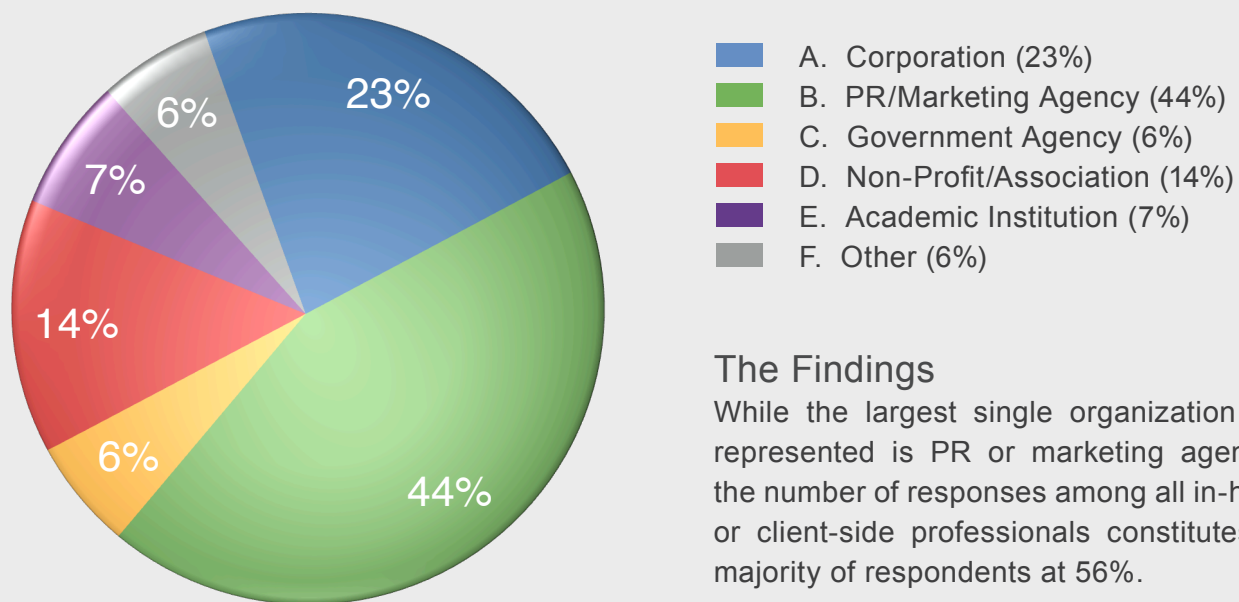


Diagram 1

### The Findings

While the largest single organization type represented is PR or marketing agencies, the number of responses among all in-house or client-side professionals constitutes the majority of respondents at 56%.

### What is your organization's annual revenue?

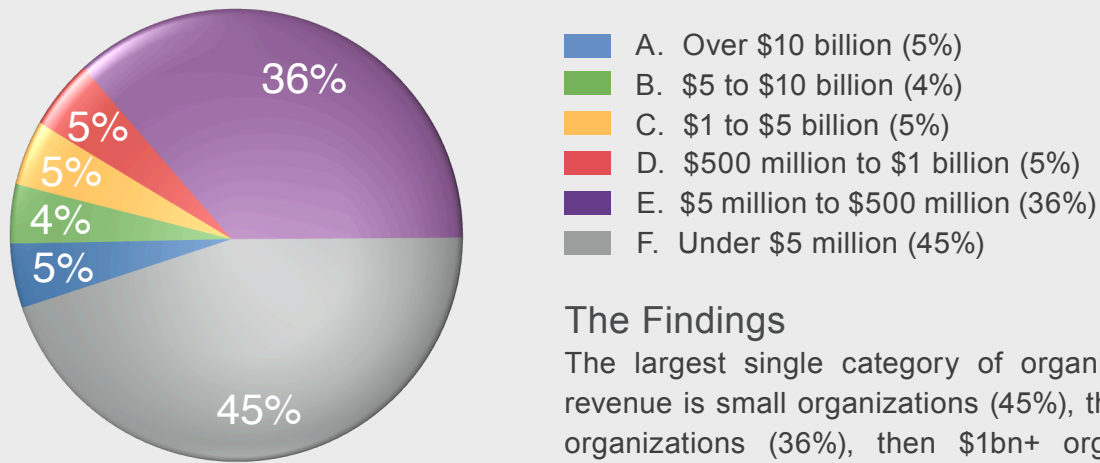


Diagram 2

#### The Findings

The largest single category of organization by annual revenue is small organizations (45%), then medium-sized organizations (36%), then \$1bn+ organizations (20%) loosely mirroring the distribution of firms in the US, and underscoring the statistical relevancy of the sample.

### What is your role in the hiring of new employees?

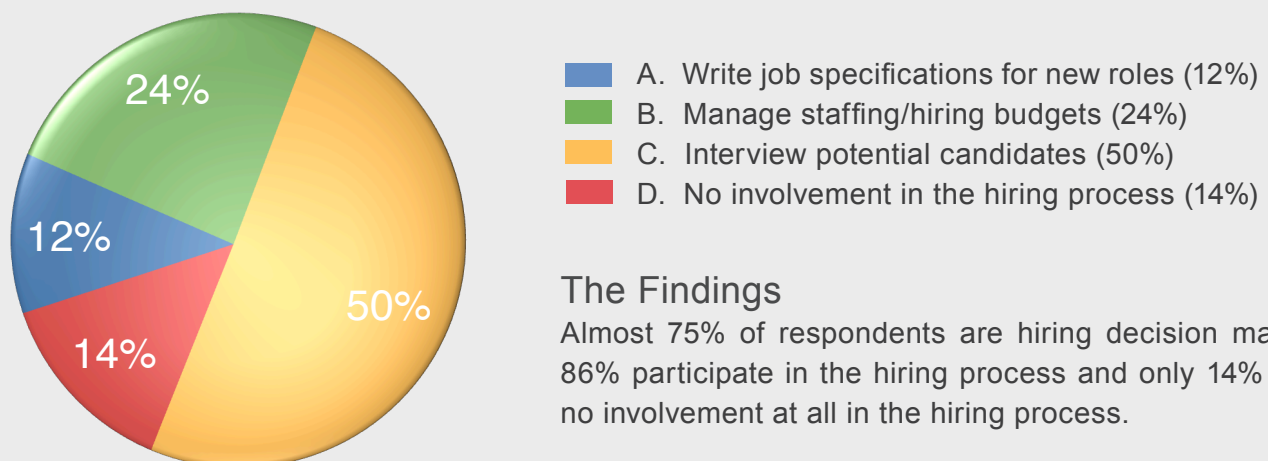


Diagram 3

#### The Findings

Almost 75% of respondents are hiring decision makers, 86% participate in the hiring process and only 14% have no involvement at all in the hiring process.

## Key Insights

Very high levels of adoption in online communications, demonstrating that new media and social media are now a core part of the web-based communications mix. They have become integral to organizational communications.

Which of the following activities does your organization currently employ as part of its web-based communications?

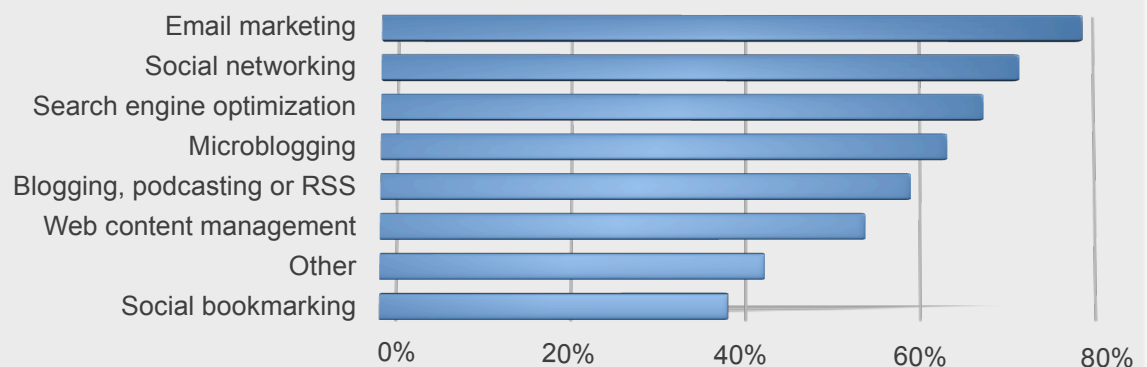


Diagram 4

### Attraction of the Sizzle

Social networking adoption out ranks natural search engine optimization, with 70% utilizing them compared to 66% for SEO, despite the fact that 82.1% of respondents surveyed in *“When Did We Start Trusting Strangers [PDF]”* said search engines are the most common way they source opinions on products, brands and services and a scant 15% of respondents in the *“2009 Edelman Trust Barometer”* found social networking sites credible as a source of information about a company. This suggests a disconnect between the online communications channels that matter most to people versus organizations. Compared to the other studies, the data suggests organizations are overlooking search engine optimization for the flash and pizzazz of sites like Facebook, FriendFeed, LinkedIn and MySpace.

### Never Mind Conversions. Just Get Out There

Discussing his recent report *“The Future of the*

*Social Web”* analyst Jeremiah Owyang envisions an age when organizations will gauge the return-on-investment of their social media engagement efforts by measuring interactions between people and brands online, where ever they may occur. But given the relative glut of available tools to easily and quickly aggregate, track and analyze conversations across the multiple information technology silos that comprise the social web, transactions occurring at an organization’s own domicile remain an easier activity to record and appreciate. An organization can exercise greater control over the user-experience on its own website than it can on a social network, where the user-experience is imposed by others, making it potentially tougher for them to convert awareness into transactions for their own gain. Therefore, it is somewhat counter-intuitive that organizational communicators do not rank web content management higher, particularly since social networks and micro-blogging services

are frequently used to distribute hyperlinks that lead friends, and friends of friends of friends, back to a landing page that usually resides on the organization's website. The findings suggest that while organizational communicators are intent on using social media to get the word out, not as much planning or strategic insight has been invested into how to convert inbound traffic into social, informational or ecommerce transactions.

### Credibility Denial

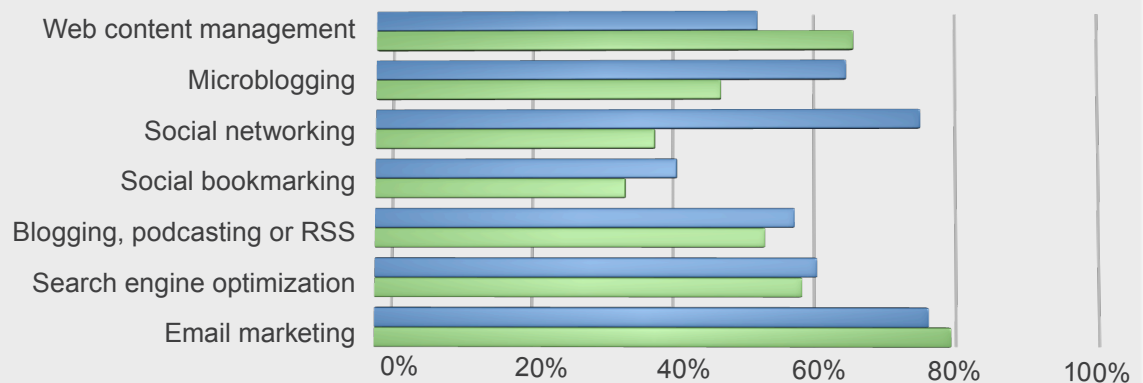
According to the "2009 Edelman Trust Barometer," as a source of company information, a company's own website is seen as more credible than business blogs, personal blogs, social networking sites and advertising. The fact that organizational communi-

cators see social networking, micro-blogging and blogging as more important than actively managing the content at their own corporate website -- particularly when people find company websites more credible than social media channels -- may indicate a fundamental gap in judgement with respect to online communications planning.

### Ease of Use Drives Adoption

Not surprisingly, micro-blogging has grown slightly bigger than blogging, 62% versus 59%, demonstrating that lowering the barrier to entry -- the "140-character news cycle" as **Shel Holtz** puts it -- drives social media adoption by making it easier for people to participate.

## Which of the following activities does your organization currently employ?

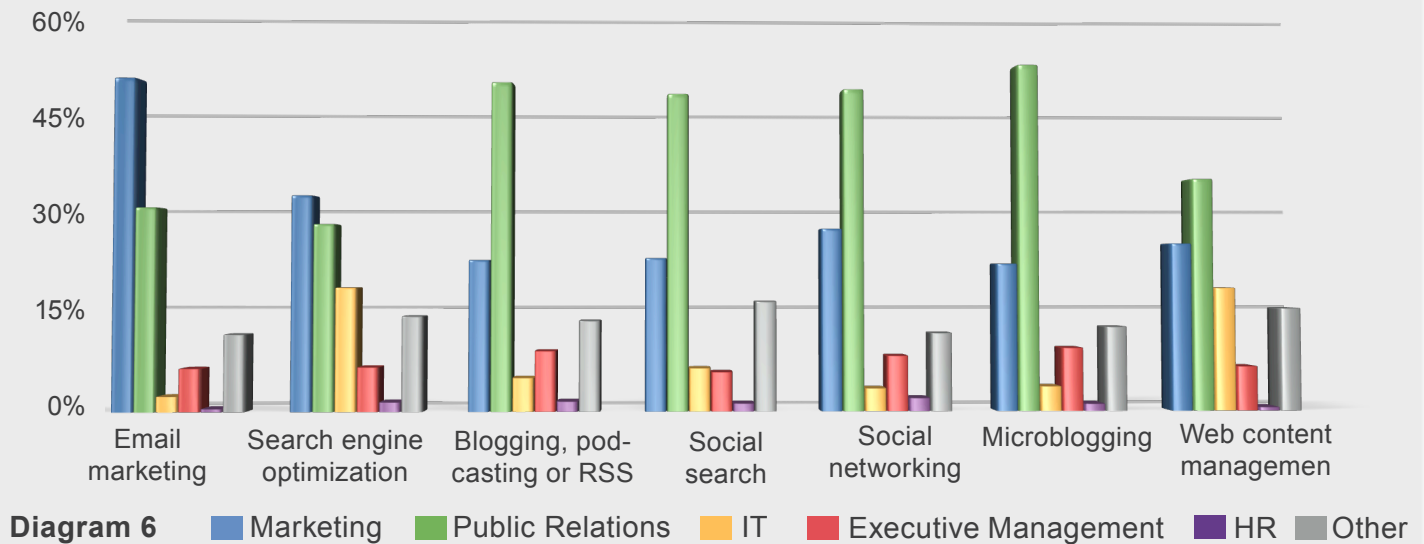


**Diagram 5** ■ Less Than \$1 bn ■ Greater Than \$1 bn

### Small to medium-sized enterprises lead the way in social networking and Twitter

Small to medium-sized enterprises are significantly ahead of larger organizations when it comes to adopting Twitter (64% versus 47%) and social networking (74% adoption versus 38%) but not in blogging which is now squarely in the large organization's repertoire. But larger organizations are managing the content on their web sites more actively than small to medium-sized enterprises.

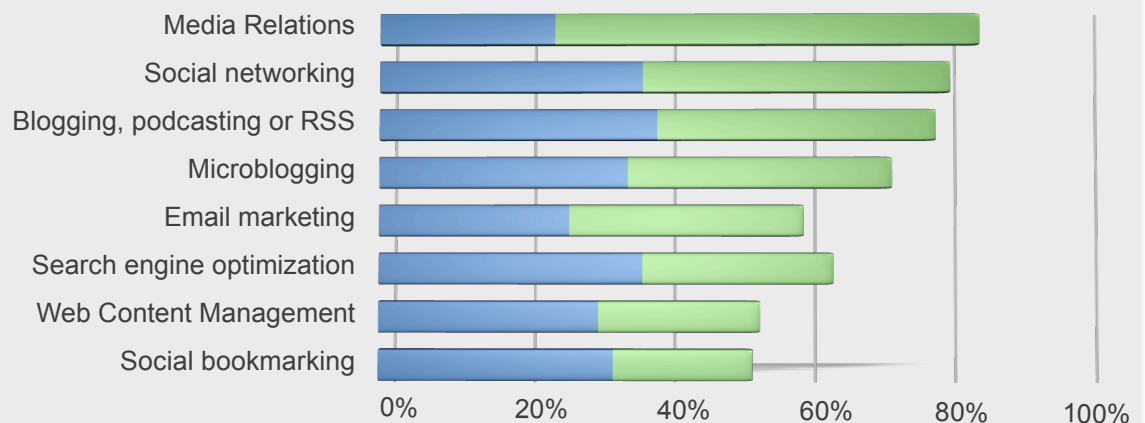
## Which of the following departments manage aspects of web strategy?



### Public Relations is leading the social media revolution inside organizations of all types and sizes

- PR leads marketing in the management of all social media communications channels. Marketing leads PR in managing only email marketing and SEO.
- In 51% of organizations, PR lead digital communications compared to 40.5% where marketing leads
- PR is responsible for blogging at 49% of all organizations. Marketing is responsible for blogging at 22% of all organizations. PR is responsible for social networking at 48% of all organizations. Marketing is responsible for social networking at 27% of all organizations.
- PR is responsible for micro-blogging at 52% of all organizations. Marketing is responsible for micro-blogging at 22% of all organizations.

## In my search for PR and/or marketing job candidates, knowledge of the following is or was important or very important.



**Diagram 7**   Somewhat Important   Very Important



**When searching for prospective candidates, knowledge of social media is almost as important as traditional media relations skills.**

- Among those responsible for hiring PR and marketing employees, 82% of respondents said mainstream media relations expertise was either important or very important. But over 80% said knowledge of social networks is either important or very important. Nearly 77% said knowledge of blogging, podcasting and RSS is either important or very important. And almost 72% said an understanding of micro-blogging services like Twitter are either important or very important.
- Other new media communications skills that hiring decision makers found important or very important are search engine optimization (62%), email outreach (56%), web content management (52%) and social bookmarking (51%).
- Hiring decision makers recognize the importance of social media in organizational communications. To meet the needs of internal and external communications today's organizations, public relations or marketing job seekers need to develop a comprehensive portfolio of digital communications skills.
- 18% of hiring decision makers have no interest at all in traditional public relations skills, signalling a shift from a mainstream media relations-focused approach.

Digital Skills Rank	Less Than \$1 bn	Greater Than \$1 bn
1	Social Networking	Blogging
2	Blogging	Social Networking
3	Micro-Blogging	Micro-Blogging
4	SEO	Web Content Management
5	Email Marketing	SEO
6	Web Content Management	Email Marketing
7	Social Bookmarking	Social Bookmarking

**Diagram 8**

**With the exception of web content management and email marketing, the new media and social media communications skills sought by \$1bn+ versus small to medium-sized enterprises are only slightly different**

The highest ranked skill for small to medium-sized enterprises is social networking and the highest

ranked for \$1bn+ is blogging, podcasting or RSS – This is a ranking question. They were asked to rank the skills in order. 1 being most sort after. It's interesting to note that while the larger firms are more actively managing the content on their web sites, they appear to be less interested in acquiring new staff members with those job skills than small to medium-sized companies.

Digital Skills Rank (by type)	Corporation	PR/Marketing Agency	Government Agency	Non-profit/ Association	Academic Institution
Email marketing	5	7	5	4	6
SEO	5	5	6	6	4
Blogging, podcasting	3	2	4	3	1
Social Bookmarking	8	6	7	8	7
Social Networking	2	1	2	1	1
Microblogging	4	4	4	5	3
Content management	7	8	3	7	5
Media relations	1	3	1	2	2

Diagram 9

### Would you consider employing a Social Media specialist?

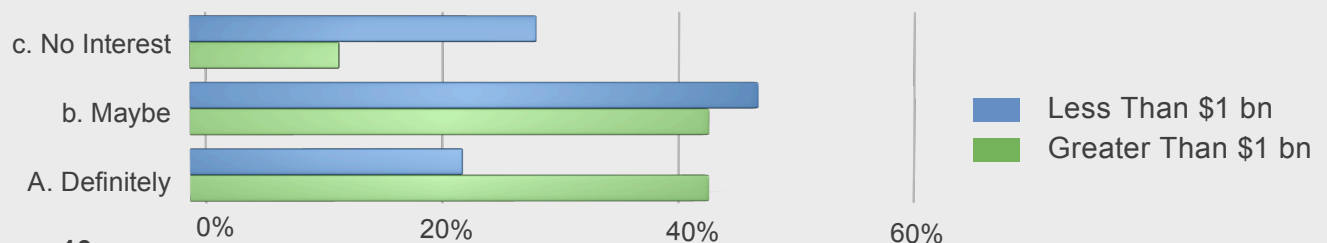
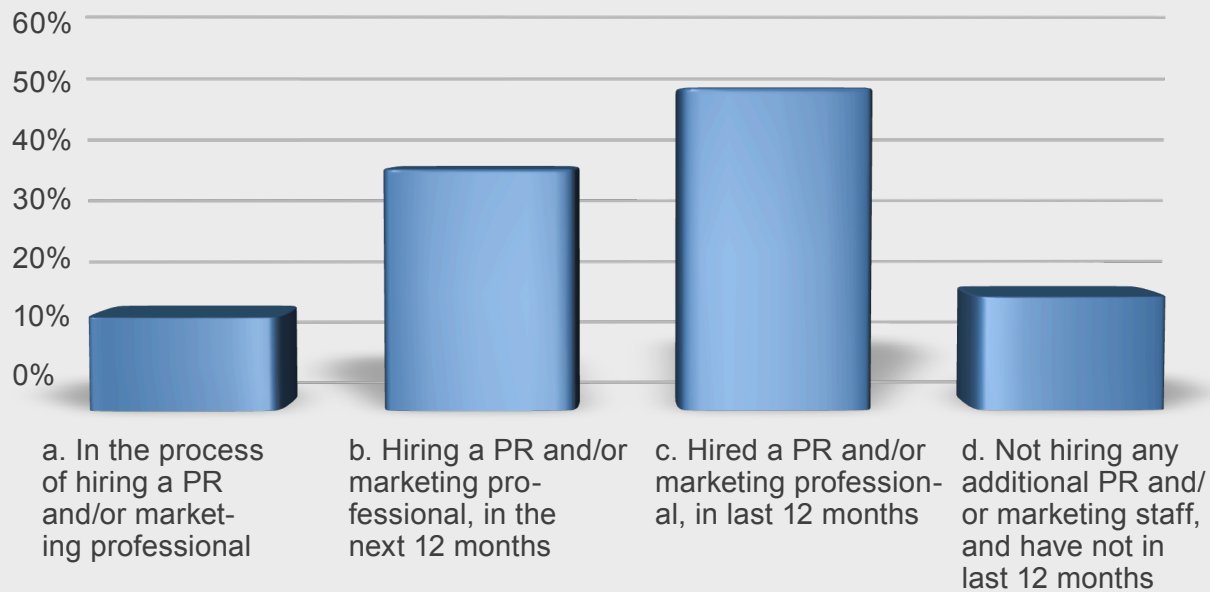


Diagram 10

**Social Media is growing in importance as a communications approach, with the majority of organizations considering hiring a specialist. This demonstrates that social media is no longer just something to do in your spare time, but rather a core discipline to be maintained by a dedicated resource.**

- 26% are definitely interested in hiring dedicated resources to maintain some degree of social media engagement, while 48% of all organizations are considering adding dedicated staff that specialize in this area.
- Interest in adding dedicated social media specialists to the workforce is markedly higher among organizations with \$1bn+ in annual revenue (43%) that it is at small to medium-sized enterprises (23%).

Currently, which of the following statements best represents your PR and/or marketing hiring activity? (select as many as apply)



**Diagram 11**

**There is a persistent degree of hiring activity among organizational communicators despite the recession. If you are looking for a job, a change in role or are starting out in your career, communications is definitely worth considering:**

- 48% had hired a PR or marketing professional in the last 12 months.
- 36% plan to hire a PR or marketing employee in the next 12 months.
- 14% are in the process of hiring now.
- Only 17% had no plans to hire, or had made no hires.

#### **More about the sample:**

- Respondents were recruited via iPressroom, Korn/Ferry International and PRSA.
- Mix of small to medium-sized enterprises and larger corporations: 45% under \$5m in annual revenue. 55% have revenue of \$5m+ and 15% earn over \$1bn annually.
- 89% of respondents are decision makers on which candidates to hire, providing a unique perspective on just how important social media is to organizations, and which social media communications skills are most sought after.
- 44% are agency staff and 66% are a mix of communications professionals from corporate, government, non-profit associations and academia.

# Conclusions

## **The risk of obsolescence**

Public relations and marketing professionals without new media and social media communications skills cannot, and will not, satisfy the requirements of today's hiring decision makers. To circumvent the risk of obsolescence, communications professionals should seek out social media and new media training opportunities that allow them to rapidly update their traditional public relations or marketing skills-sets.

## **Public relations leads in social networking**

While marketing is responsible for email marketing and natural search engine optimization at most organizations, PR leads in social networking, micro-blogging, blogging, podcasting, social bookmarking and even web content management.

## **A potential gap in strategy**

The good news is organizations are serious about social media engagement and new media communications. The bad news is the specific channels they're most interested in deploying are not necessarily the ones used or trusted most by the public, indicating a potential gap in strategy.

## **ROI evaluation challenges**

Despite the fact that other studies referenced in this report cite company websites as the most credible source of company information, the only online communications skill less important than managing website content -- which 52% of respondents said is important or very important -- is social bookmarking at 51%, suggesting that organizations are taking the same approach to social networking as they took to mass media relations. Rather than focus on attracting or pulling visitors to their website by publishing high quality content and researching popular language, organizations appear to be more interested with pushing out messages to "friends" through social media, even though, in many cases, those messages include hyperlinks back to their own websites. Until these organizations learn to develop a more sophisticated approach to building and managing landing pages and web content management on their websites, they will have difficulty evaluating their return on investment for these emerging channels.

While some have predicted that destination websites will become increasingly less important, until measurement tools become readily available to track interactions across the social web, building a business case for online engagement and demonstrating quantifiable social, information and transactional results may remain largely the province of an organization's website. Given Facebook's walled garden, competitive strategy, the challenge of aggregating comprehensive data on Facebook interactions seems particularly illusive, potentially frustrating at least any near term demise of the use of destination websites for organizational communications.

# 2009 Digital Readiness Report

The Online Communications Skills Employers Want and  
Candidates Need in Today's Public Relations and Marketing Job Market



KORN/FERRY INTERNATIONAL

