

Global PR industry grows by 10.6% in 2021

The global PR industry has recovered in some style after [declining 4% in 2020](#), growing by 10.6% in 2021.



Source: ©Jakub Jirsák [123rf](#) The global PR industry has grown by 10.6% in 2021

This is according to PRovoke Media's [annual ranking of the world's top 250 PR firms](#).

Accounting for the numerous firms that reported outside of the Top 250, along with the vast number of smaller firms that do not provide revenue figures, PRovoke Media estimates the size of the global PR agency industry at \$18bn, up from \$15.8bn in 2020. Meanwhile, the 'floor' for the Top 250 has risen to record levels of \$6.4m.

First double-digit expansion

Based on submissions from more than 400 PR firms across the world, along with revenue estimates for key firms that chose not to submit as they emerged from the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it shows that the top 250 PR firms had a fee income of around \$15.3bn in 2021, up 16% in USD terms.

Its constant currency analysis reveals a Top 250 increase of just under 11%, with the PR industry also recording healthy growth of 7% versus the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

It also marks the industry's first double-digit expansion since it rebounded from the Global Financial Crisis more than a

decade ago.

"Last year, we commented on the resilience of the public relations industry, even as it declined during the first year of the pandemic," says PRovoke Media founder Paul Holmes.

"This year, the industry recorded robust double-digit growth, more than recouping any losses. This is not just business as usual; this is public relations demonstrating its value across the board as an increasingly mission-critical discipline," he says.



The year that was in PR and what to expect for 2022

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A 'pandemic dividend'

Once again, the industry's 2021 performance was underpinned by strong returns from the [Top 10 group](#), demonstrating that diversification not only mitigated the worst of the pandemic but helped firms prosper, too.

While Top 10 growth was outstripped by midsize and smaller firms, it seems safe to conclude that last year saw the PR industry embrace its potential in terms of strategic counsel, creative innovation and sector-specific expertise.

Indeed, the results suggest a 'pandemic dividend', reflecting the manner in which the Covid-19 crisis has reinforced and elevated the critical value of empathetic public relations across multiple stakeholder groups — a state of affairs that has played to the industry's strengths.

Global Top 250 growth

The Global 250 grew 15.7% to \$15.3bn in USD terms last year, compared to a 0.3% decline in 2020.

In constant currency terms, fee income jumped by 10.6% compared to a 3.9% decline in 2020, based on a like-for-like comparison of those firms reporting fee income for 2021 and 2020. That also means the Global 250 grew by 6.8% compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

"One big success story was the UK, where growth was better than 20% in both constant currency and US dollar terms," explains Holmes.

"The relative weakness of the euro impacted numbers from continental Europe, masking what was a pretty good year," he adds.

Top 10

The world's Top 10 firms reported fee income of \$6bn, up 13% on 2020 (\$5.3bn).

Growth was led by number one firm Edelman, which recorded 17% expansion to close in on becoming the first \$1bn PR agency.

Edelman was one of six agencies to report double-digit growth in 2021, alongside excellent performances from Brunswick (+36%), Real Chemistry (+32%) and Finsbury (+18%).

After a difficult 2020 in which they declined by 8%, midsize PR firms — defined for these purposes as those within \$50m to \$250m — reclaimed their position as the industry's growth engine, expanding by 15.4% (constant currency) in 2021 to

\$3.9bn, and up 19.4% compared to their 2019 numbers.

Smaller firms (\$15m to \$50m) also performed well — up 16% in constant currency terms.

Public vs independent: A watershed moment

One of the dominant industry themes of the past decade is the ability of independent PR firms to outgrow and, in many cases, 'out-innovate' their publicly-held peers.

And while that gap narrowed two years ago, independents restated this argument to handsome effect in 2021, delivering a significant watershed moment in the process.

In 2021, independent PR firms were up 20% in constant currency terms to \$8.2bn, marking the first time in the Rankings' decade-plus history that independent PR firms now account for more fee income than publicly-owned players.

Independent PR firms now comprise 61% of the global PR agency market, in terms of fee income.

For the first time, independent PR firms account for more than half the revenue in the survey, while the big four revenue share declined to 29%.

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