



The State of PR **2021**

How PR teams build relationships, measure success,
and leverage technology in 2021

A STUDY BY

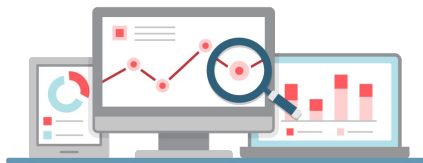
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In this report, we seek to answer:



- 1** | What are the top challenges PR pros face?



- 2** | What tech and tools do PR teams use to do their jobs?



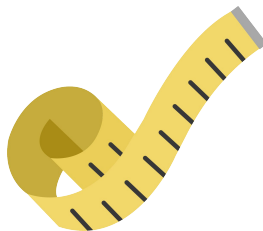
- 3** | How do PR pros try to reach journalists?



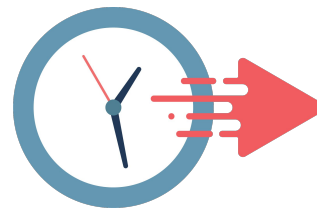
- 4** | How do PR pros use social media?



- 5** | How are PR budgets changing and how are teams allocating them?



- 6** | How are PR teams measuring success?



- 7** | What is the future of PR?

About this survey

We surveyed **1,618** communications professionals from **April 26th** to **May 17th, 2021**.

Company type:

- 50% from agencies
- 35% from brands
- 15% from nonprofits

Location:

- 81% US
- 4% Canada
- 3% UK
- 1% Australia
- 1% India
- 10% other

Industry:

- 18% technology
- 15% nonprofit
- 12% education
- 9% entertainment and media
- 8% healthcare and pharmaceuticals
- 7% financial services and banking
- 5% consumer products
- 4% software
- 4% government
- 4% food and beverage
- 3% travel and tourism
- 3% ecommerce and retail

Employee count:

- Solo: 9%
- 2-10: 17%
- 10-49: 20%
- 50-99: 10%
- 100-499: 17%
- 500-4,999: 15%
- 5,000-9,999: 4%
- 10,000+: 7%

PR team size:

- Solo: 21%
- 2-10: 48%
- 11-100: 23%
- 100-1000: 6%
- 1000+: 3%

See extended audience breakdown in the appendix.

About this survey

We surveyed **1,618** communications professionals from **April 26th** to **May 17th, 2021**.

Role:

- 20% CEO/founder/owner
- 25% manager
- 23% director
- 18% associate/coordinator/specialist
- 10% CXO/VP
- 2% other
- 1% intern

Almost all CEO/founders are from agencies with under 100 employees. Looking at companies with over 100 employees, 34% are managers, 27% director, 23% coordinator/specialist and 14% CXO/VP.

PR focus:

- 94% media relations
- 58% media measurement and reporting
- 53% corporate communications
- 45% executive communications
- 44% crisis management
- 34% internal communications
- 25% corporate social responsibility

Agency PR pros tend to have 3 focuses while brands and non-profits have 4.

See extended audience breakdown in the appendix.

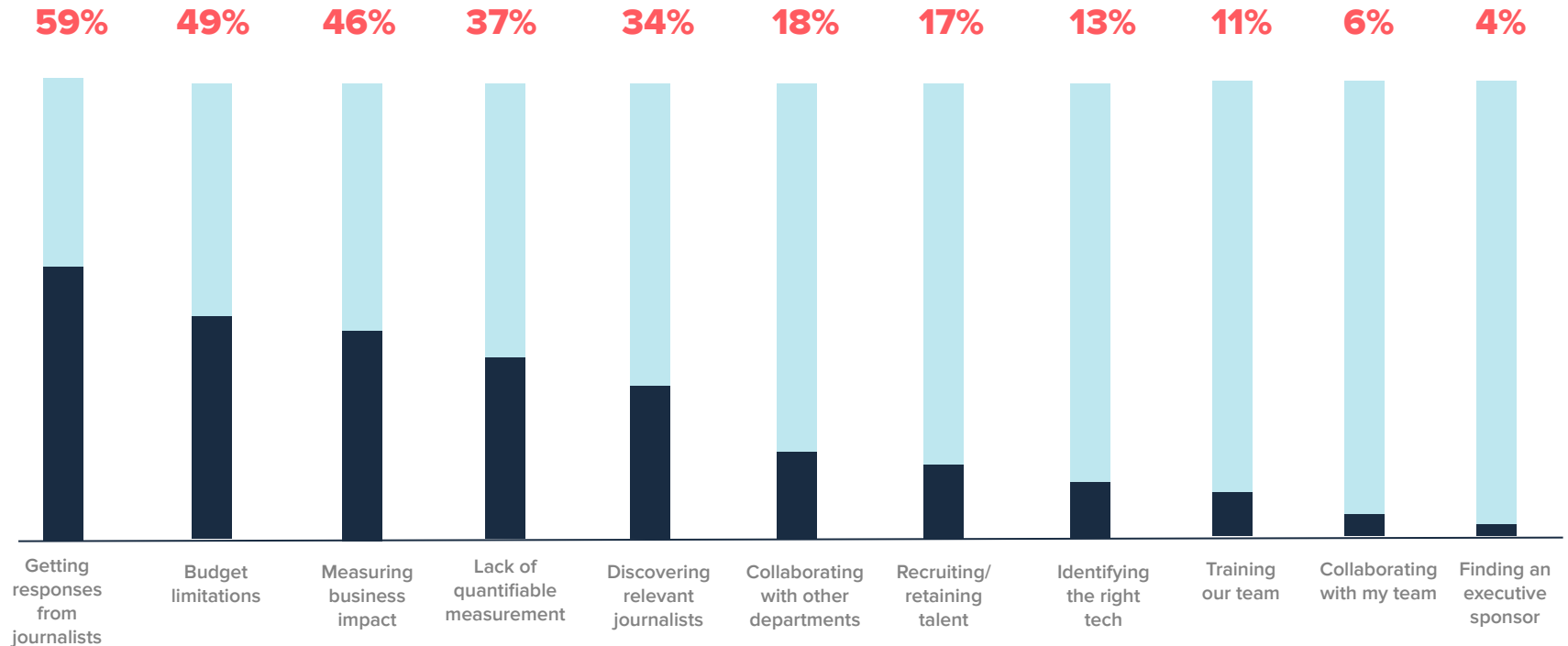


1

What are the top challenges PR pros face?

PR's biggest challenges: getting journalist responses and measuring impact

Which of the following challenges does your PR/communications team face? (select all that apply)





Which of the following challenges does your PR/communications team face?

Agencies are more likely to say getting responses from journalists (65% vs 51% for brands and nonprofits), while brands and nonprofits are more likely to say measuring business impact (51% vs 43% for agencies).

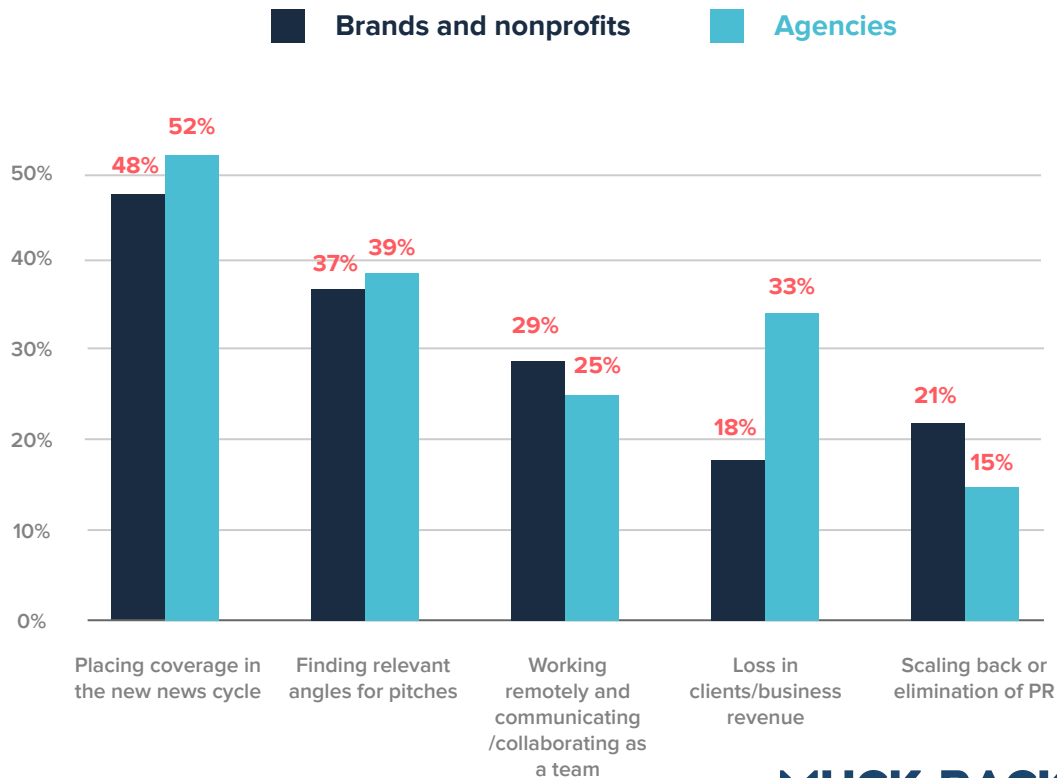
67% of nonprofits say budget limitations is their number one challenge.

Top challenges during the COVID-19 era:

Getting coverage in the news cycle and finding relevant pitch angles

While the challenges PR pros said they face were generally consistent across company sizes and types, agencies are more likely to say loss in clients/revenue (**33%**, vs just **18%** for brands and nonprofits)

What have been your company's biggest challenges during the COVID-19 era? (select all that apply)

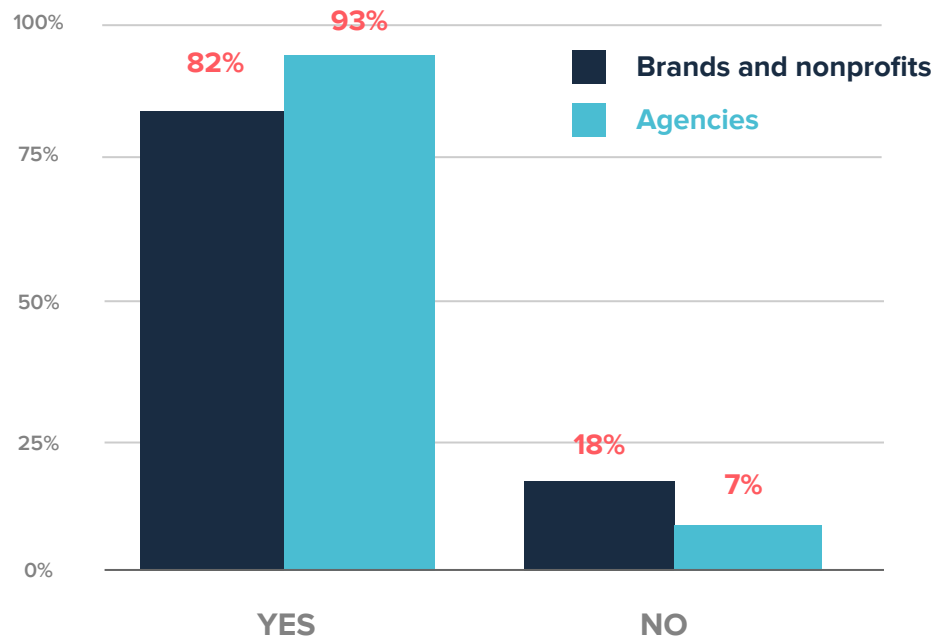


PR pros are confident in their communications strategies

The majority of PR pros believe their organization's PR/communications strategy is effective. Only **18%** of brands and nonprofits and **7%** of agencies believe their strategies are not.

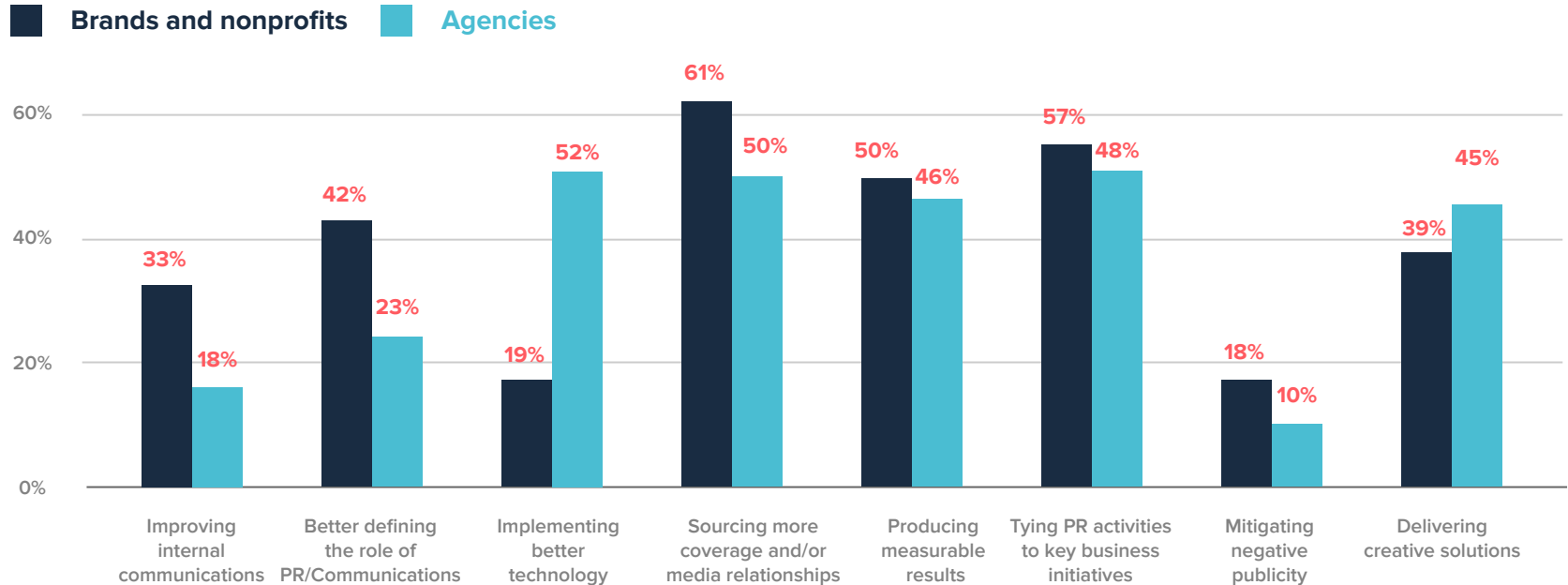
Company size and seniority do not impact confidence in PR strategy (i.e. CXOs from large companies are generally as confident as coordinators/specialists at small companies).

Do you believe your organization's PR/communications strategy is effective?



PR pros see sourcing more coverage and tying PR activity to business outcomes as the top ways to increase value at their organizations

How can PR increase its value inside your organization? (select all that apply)



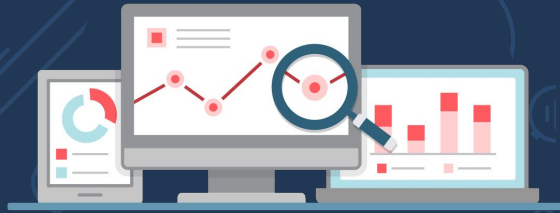


How can PR increase its value inside your organization?

PR pros from brands, nonprofits and agencies all cite sourcing more coverage and/or media relationships as the top ways they can increase value inside their organizations.

Brands and nonprofits are significantly more likely to cite improving internal communications, better defining the role of PR internally, tying PR activities to key business initiatives and mitigating negative publicity.

Agencies are more likely to say delivering creative solutions.

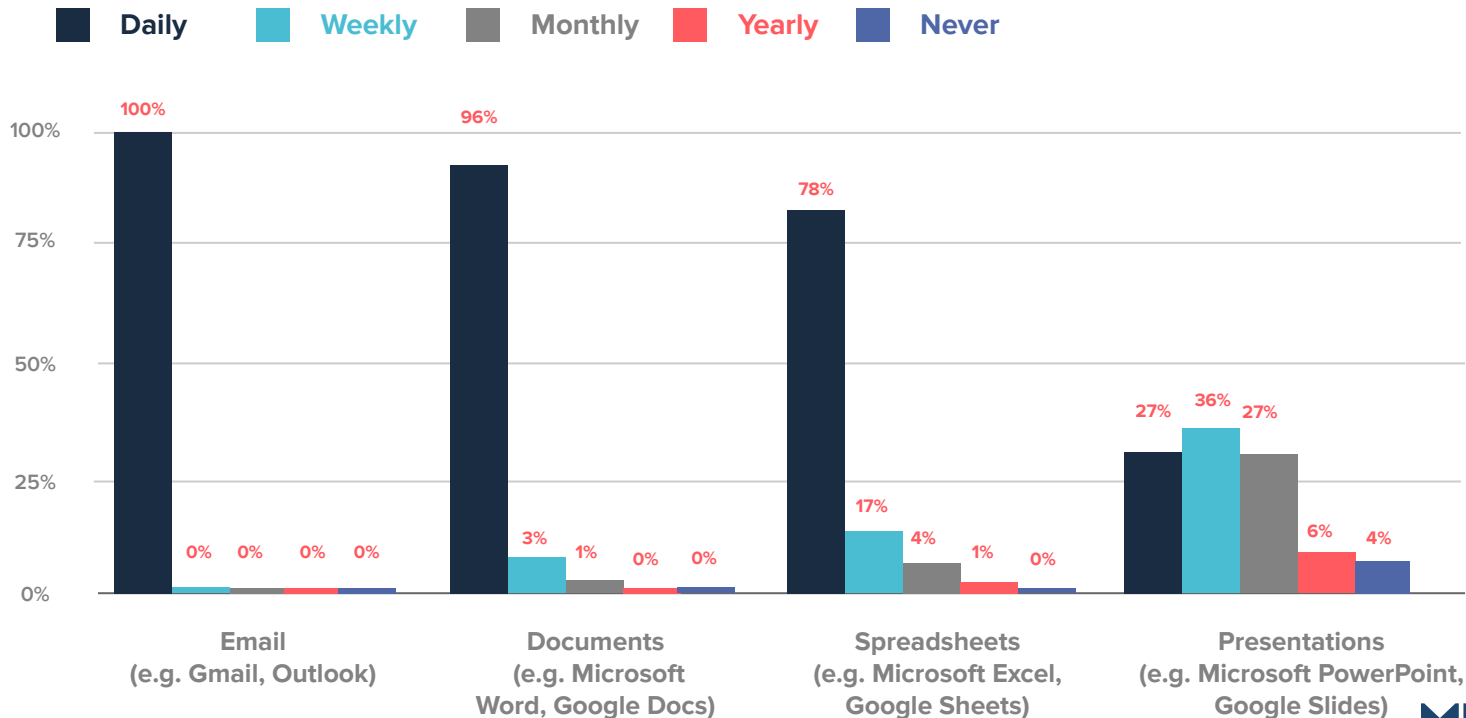


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What tech and tools do PR teams use to do their jobs?

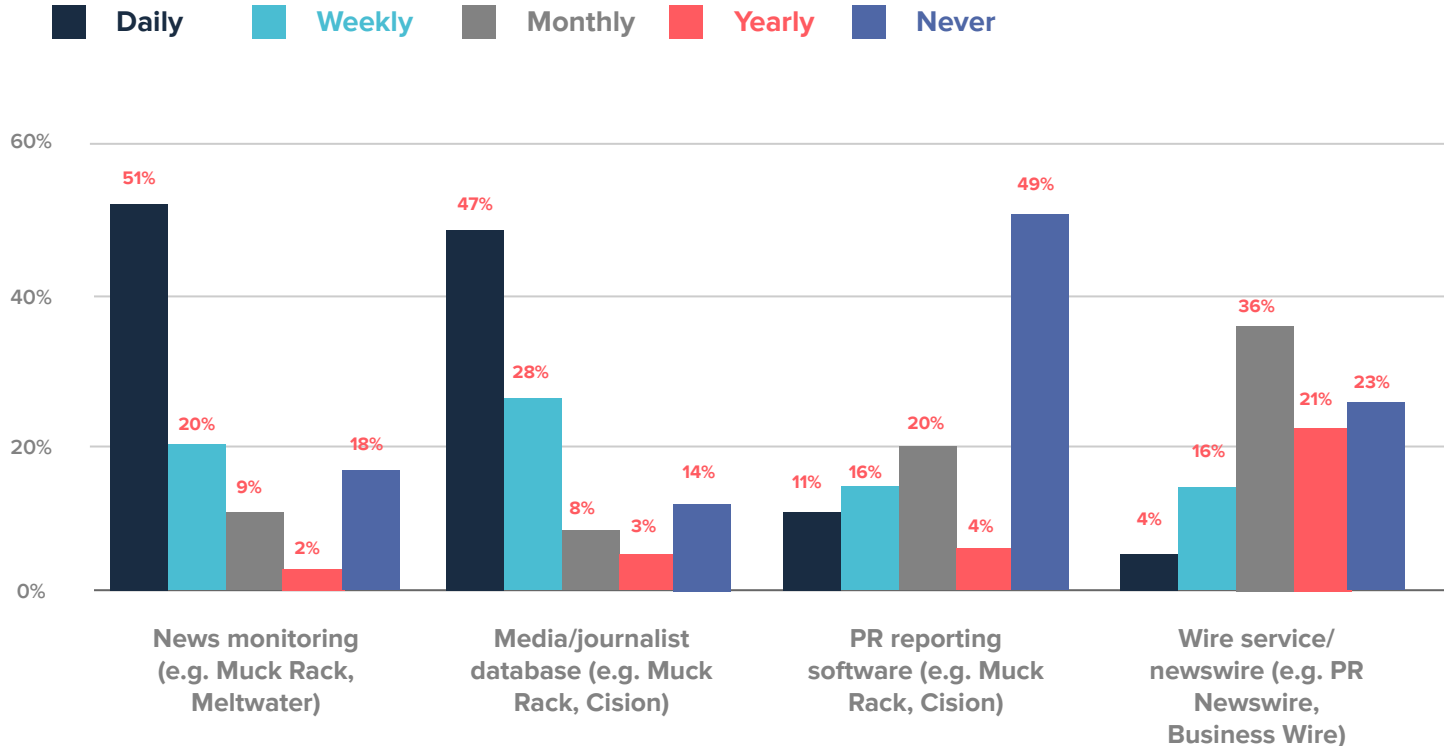
Most PR pros continue to use **email, spreadsheets and documents** daily

How often do you use the following general productivity tools?



About half of PR pros use **news monitoring and media databases** daily

How often do you use the following PR tools?





How often do you use the following PR tools?

Most agency PR pros use a media database (57%) and news monitoring (51%) daily. The highest percentage are likely to use wire services monthly (41%).

49% of PR pros do not use PR reporting software to measure and analyze the impact of earned media efforts, followed 25% who use it at least weekly and 21% who do monthly.

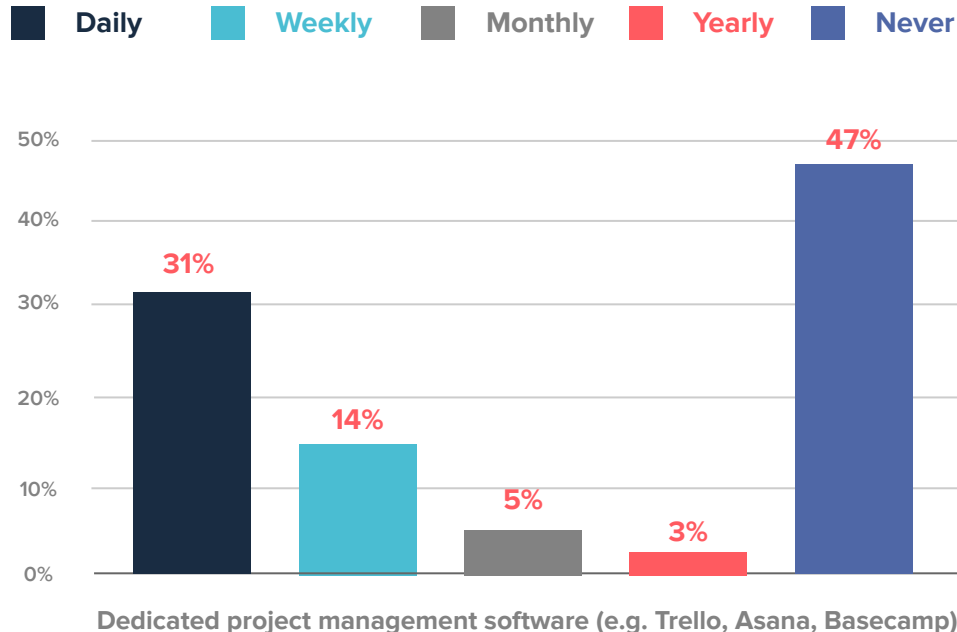
Most brands and nonprofits use monitoring software (50%) and media database (37%) daily. The highest percentage also use wire services monthly (31%).

Under a third of PR pros use project management software daily

31% of PR pros use dedicated project management software (e.g. Trello, Asana, Basecamp), daily, **14%** weekly, **5%** monthly, **3%** yearly, **47%** never.

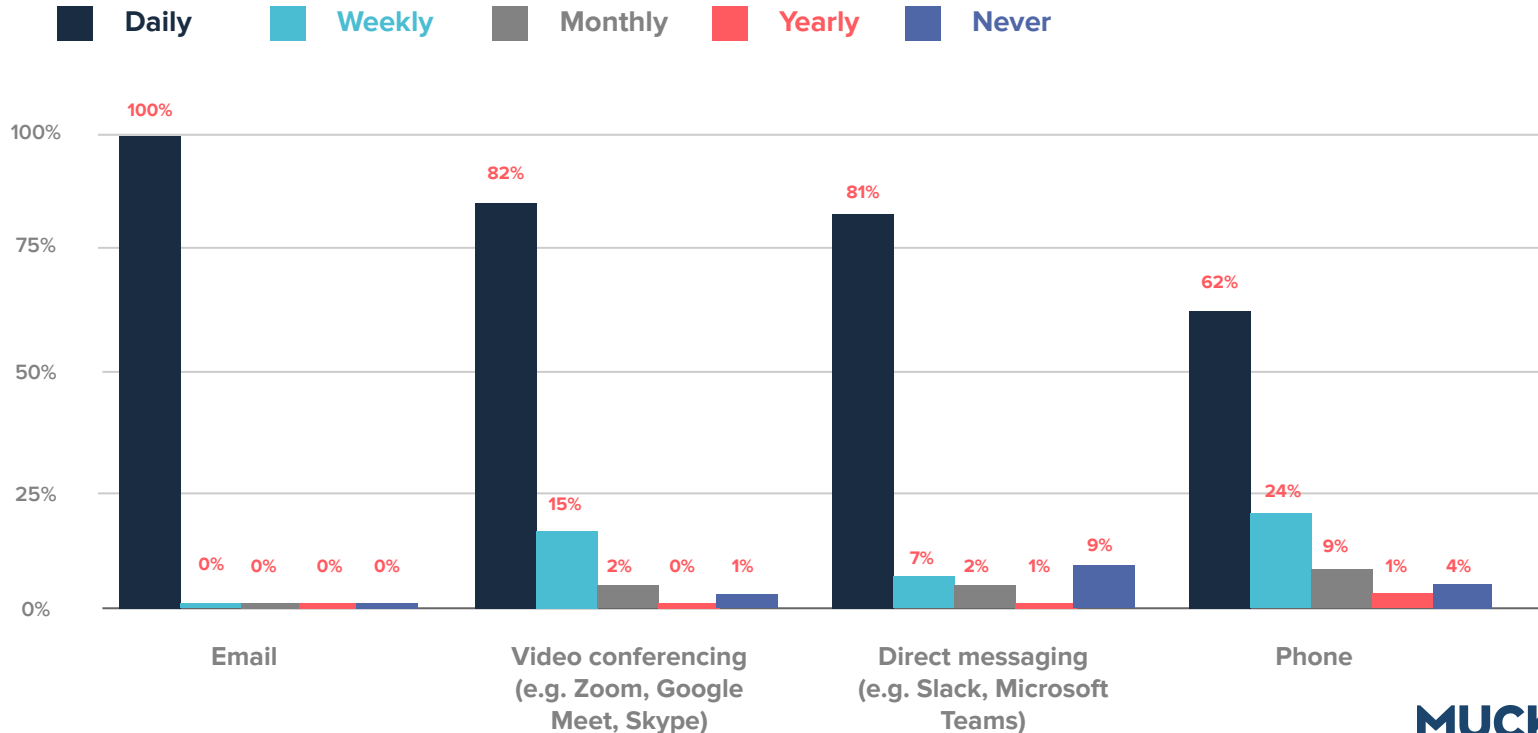
Brands and nonprofits are more likely to use project management software (**35%** daily, **18%** weekly) than agencies (**28%** daily, **10%** weekly).

How often do you use the following project management tools?



Direct messaging cements itself as a staple alongside video conferencing and email

How often do you use the following types of communications tools?





How often do you use the following types of communication?

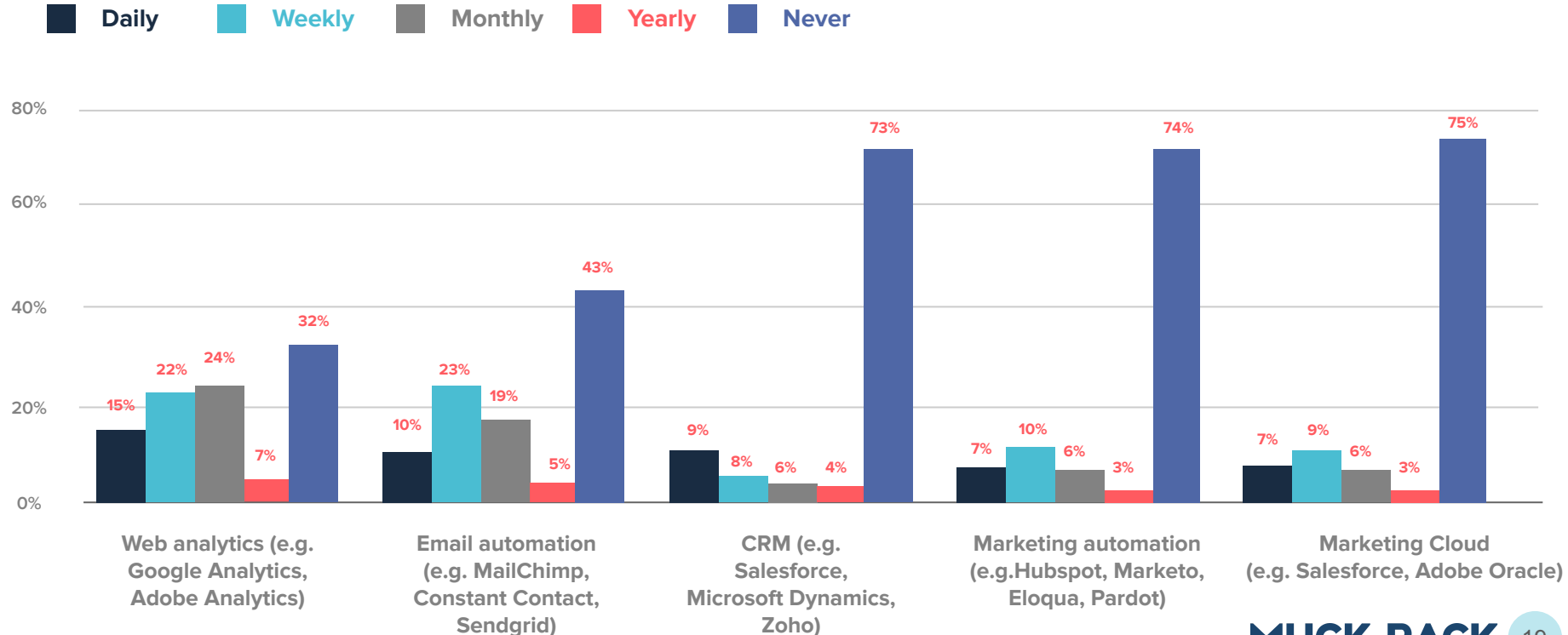
Many more PR pros this year said they're using direct messaging tools daily (81%, up from 67% last year).

Brands and nonprofits are slightly more likely to use direct messaging tools daily than agencies (89% vs 77%), while PR pros at agencies are slightly more likely to use the phone to communicate (55% vs 67%).

82% say they use video conferencing software (down from 89% last year; though it is worth noting that we issued the State of PR 2020 survey right after stay at home orders were going into effect).

Marketing software usage: web analytics software on top, followed by email automation software

How often do you use the following types of marketing software?





How often do you use the following types of marketing software?

61% of PR pros use web analytics software at least monthly (78% of brands and non-profits, 55% of agencies).

Almost half use email automation software at least monthly and 34% use it weekly.

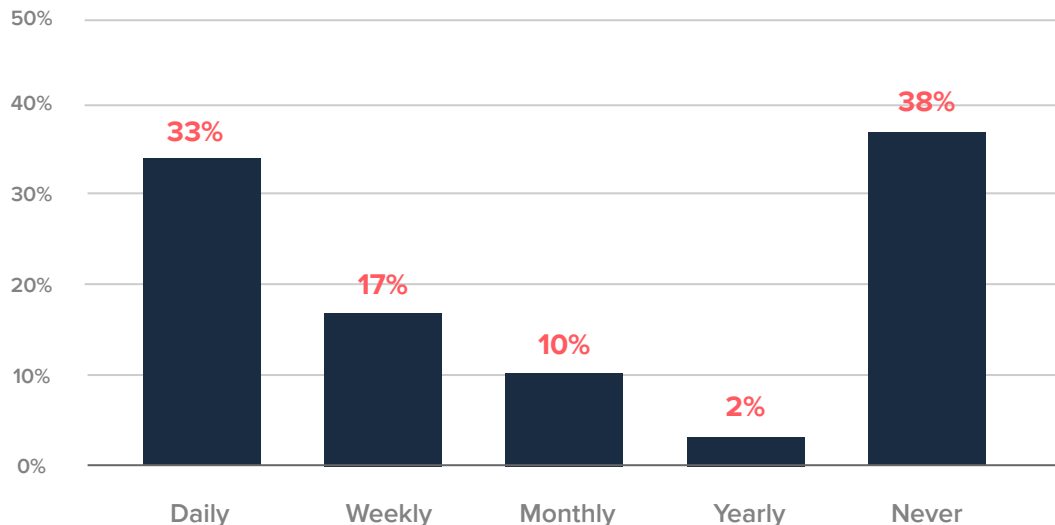
Under 10% of agency PR pros use marketing automation, CRM or marketing clouds, while just over 20% of brand and nonprofit PR pros do.

Over half of PR pros use social media tools on a weekly basis

33% of PR pros use social media tools daily and another **17%** use them weekly.

Brands and nonprofits are more likely to use social media tools daily (**43%**) or weekly (**15%**) than agencies (**24%** daily or **18%** weekly).

How often do you use tools to manage or monitor social media?



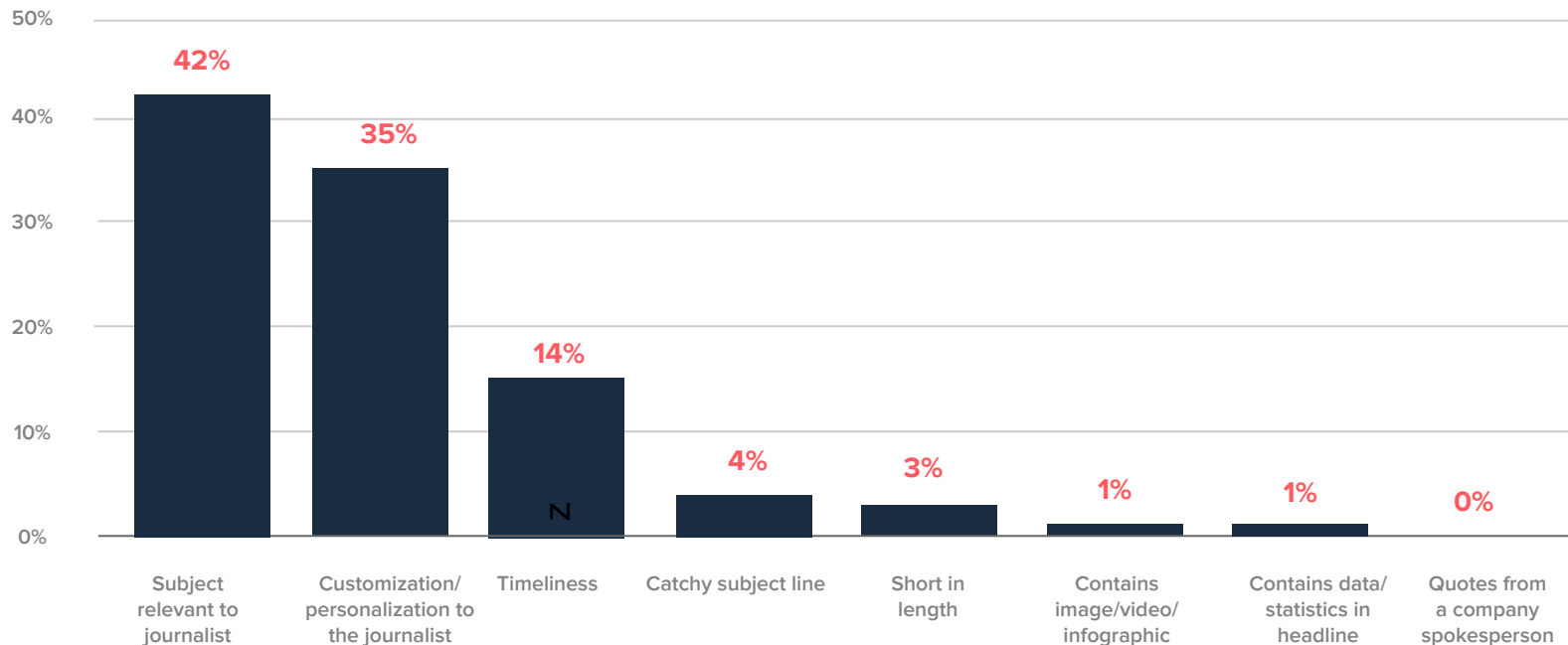


3

How do PR pros connect with journalists?

PR pros believe **relevance** is even more important than **timeliness** when pitching

Which of the following components do you believe is most important in a pitch?





Which of the following components do you believe is most important in a pitch?

While 42% say subject relevant to journalists, only 14% say timeliness. In other words, you might have hot breaking news, but if you send it to the wrong person, it doesn't matter.

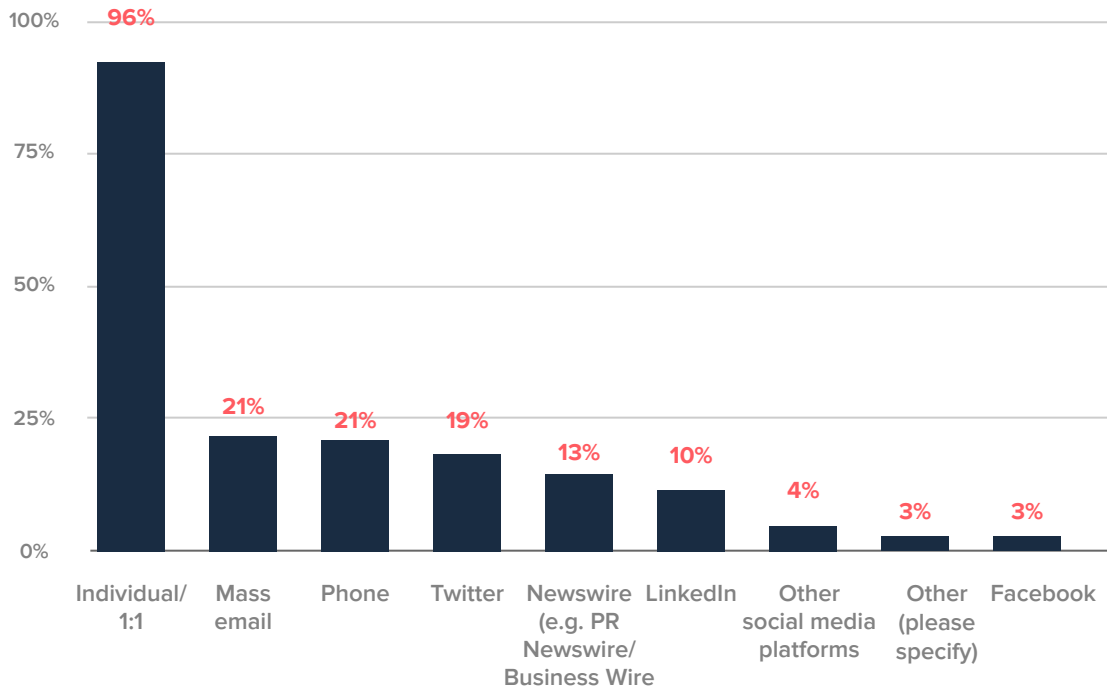
However, according to the [State of Journalism 2021](#), bad timing was the number one reasons journalists rejected otherwise relevant pitches, followed by lack of personalization.

96% of PR pros say individual emails are the most effective channel for pitching journalists

PR pros across company types and sizes use 1:1 email as their primary channel for pitching alongside a wide variety of secondary channels.

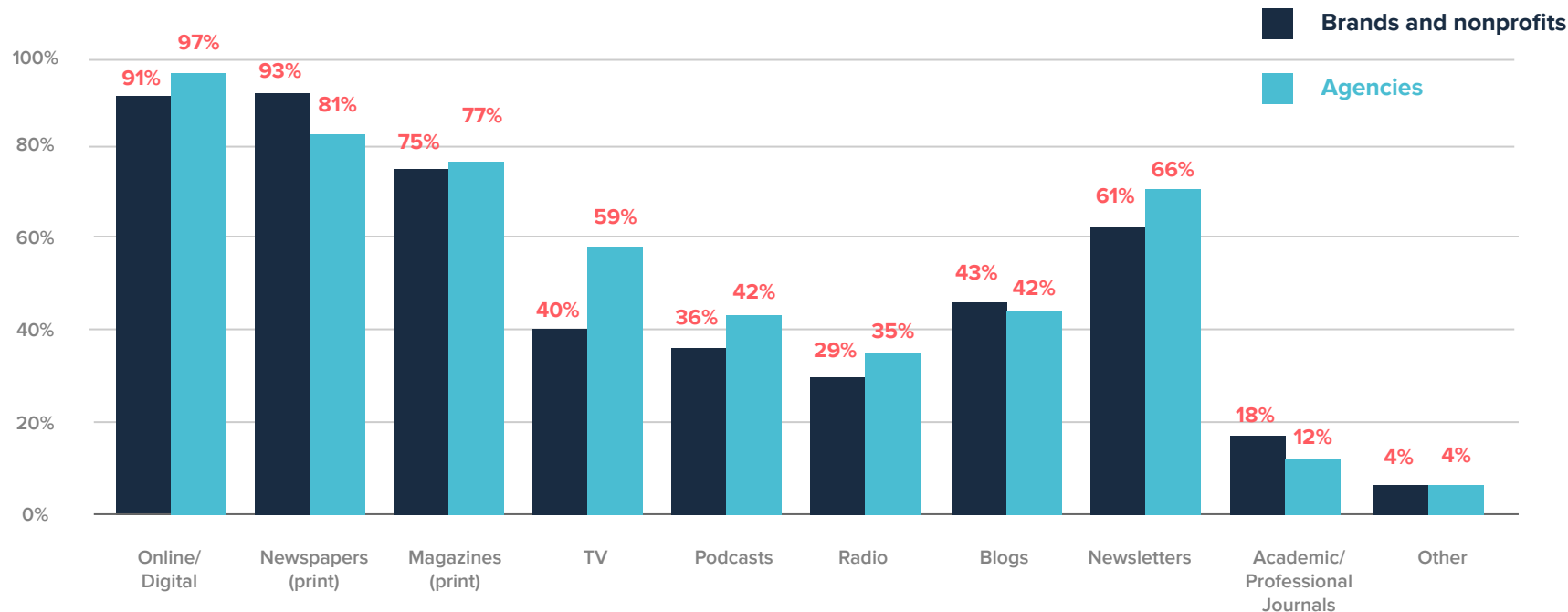
Agencies are slightly more likely to pick up the phone (**23%** vs **18%** for brands and nonprofits), while brands and nonprofits are slightly more likely to use newswires (**16%** vs **10%** for agencies).

Which of the following channels do you find to be the most effective for pitching journalists? (Select all that apply)



The most common types of media to pitch are online, newspapers, magazines, and TV, with podcasts and newsletters on the rise

Which types of media do you commonly pitch? (Select all that apply)





Which types of media do you commonly pitch? (Select all that apply)

PR pros pitch an average of 4 types of media. Most pitch online/digital (95%), newspapers (78%) and magazines (70%).

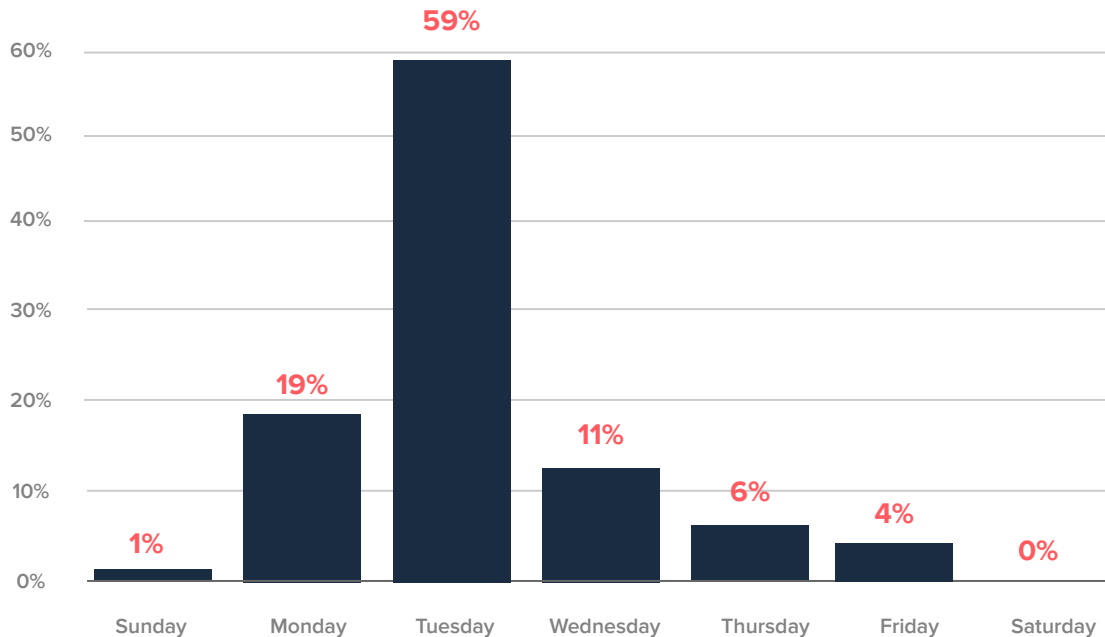
Over half pitch magazines and TV. 50% of PR pros are not yet pitching podcasts and 68% have not pitched newsletters, meaning PR pros have plenty of upside to start pitching on these channels.

Tuesday is the most popular day to send pitches

While Tuesday remains the most popular day to send pitches, past editions of [the State of Journalism](#) show that **journalists have said they prefer to be pitched on Mondays for years.**

While PR pros may be coming back to full inboxes after the weekend and be thinking they're giving journalists a day to catch up, waiting until Tuesday can be costly if journalists have already set their plans for the week.

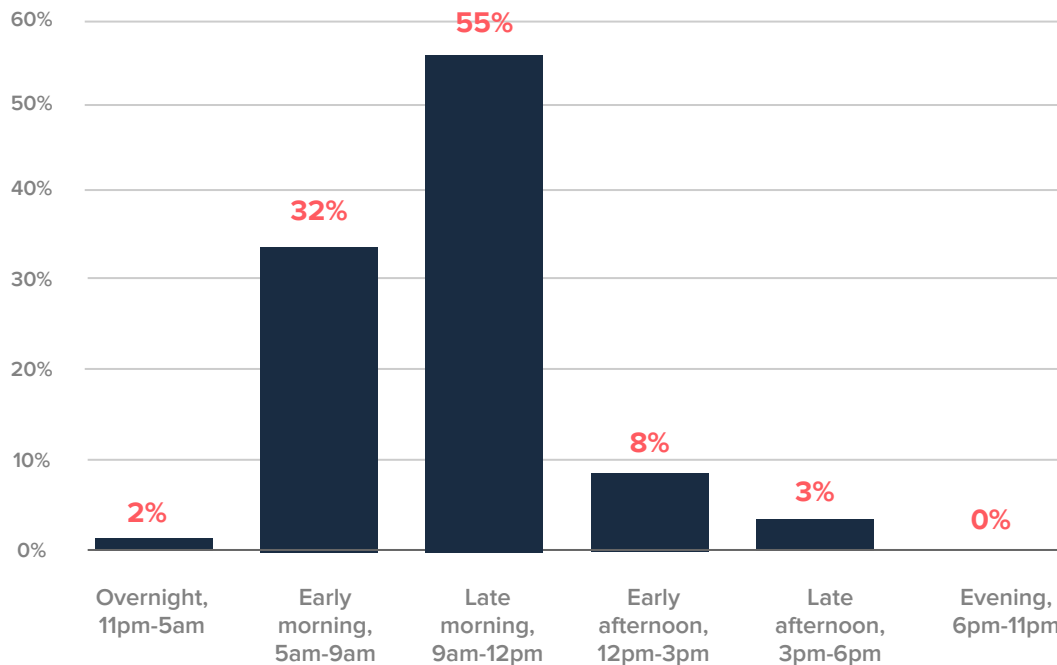
On what day of the week do you most like to send pitches?



PR pros say late morning is the best time to send a pitch

While **55%** of PR pros say late morning is the best time to send a pitch (9am-12pm) and **32%** say early morning (5am-9am), [the State of Journalism 2021](#) found that journalists have a slight preference towards early morning (**34%**) over late morning (**33%**).

When is generally the best time to send a pitch? (all times EST)

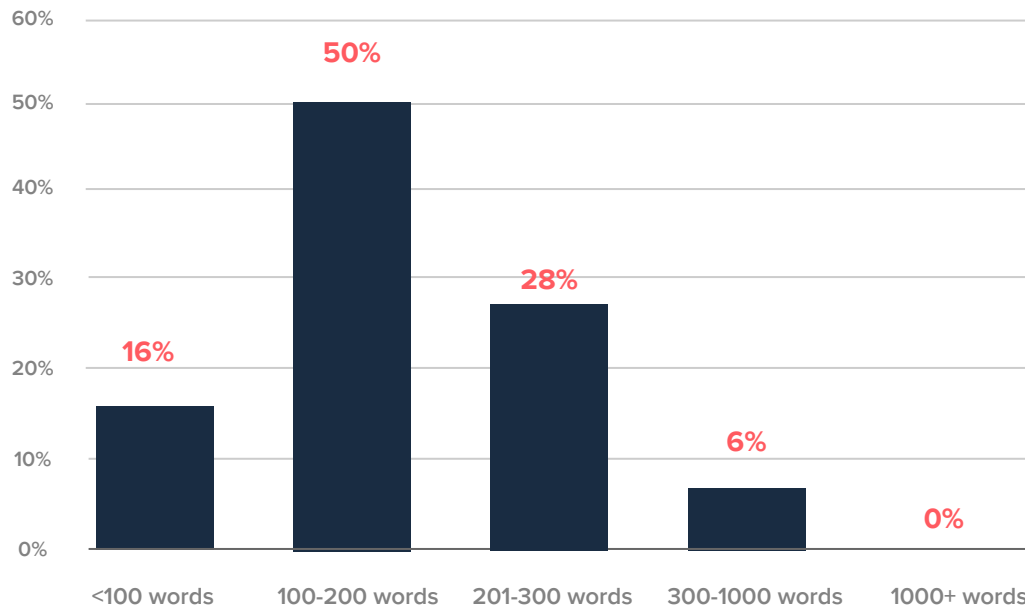


Keeping it concise: the average pitch is 100-200 words

94% of PR pros say their average pitch length is under 300 words, which respects what [the State of Journalism 2021](#) found to be journalists' overwhelming (**91%**) preference that pitches be under 300 words.

Still, while one in four journalists would like to receive pitches under 100 words, only **16%** of PR pros say they send pitches that short.

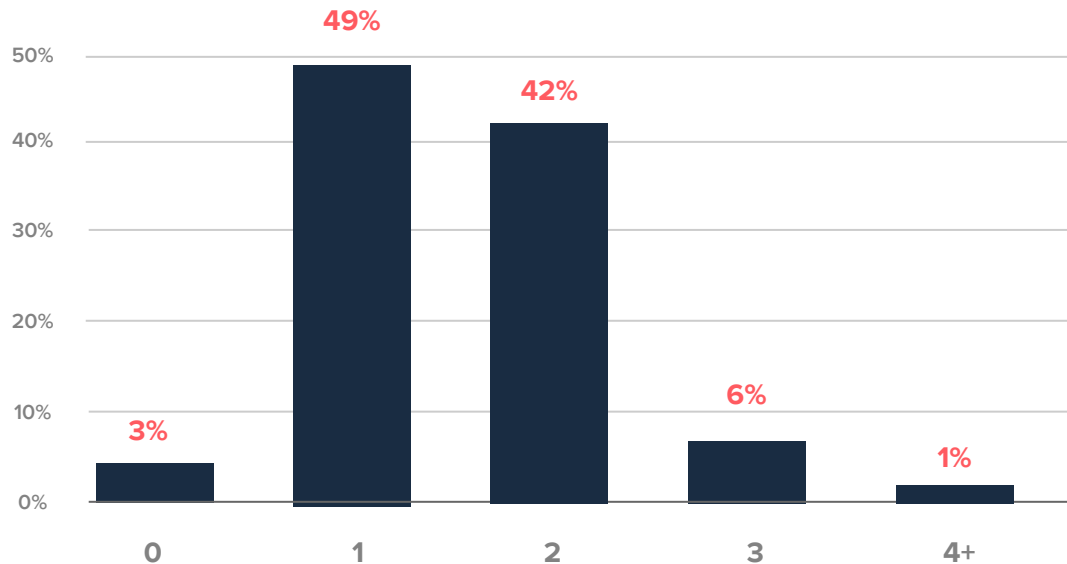
How long is the average pitch you send to journalists?



Most PR pros say **it's acceptable to send 1-2 follow up emails**

Most PR pros send one or two follow up emails after an initial pitch. According to [the State of Journalism 2021](#), **90%** of journalists say it's OK to send at least 1 follow up, **31%** welcome 2 follow ups but under **8%** are OK with more than 3.

How many follow up emails are acceptable to send after your initial pitch?



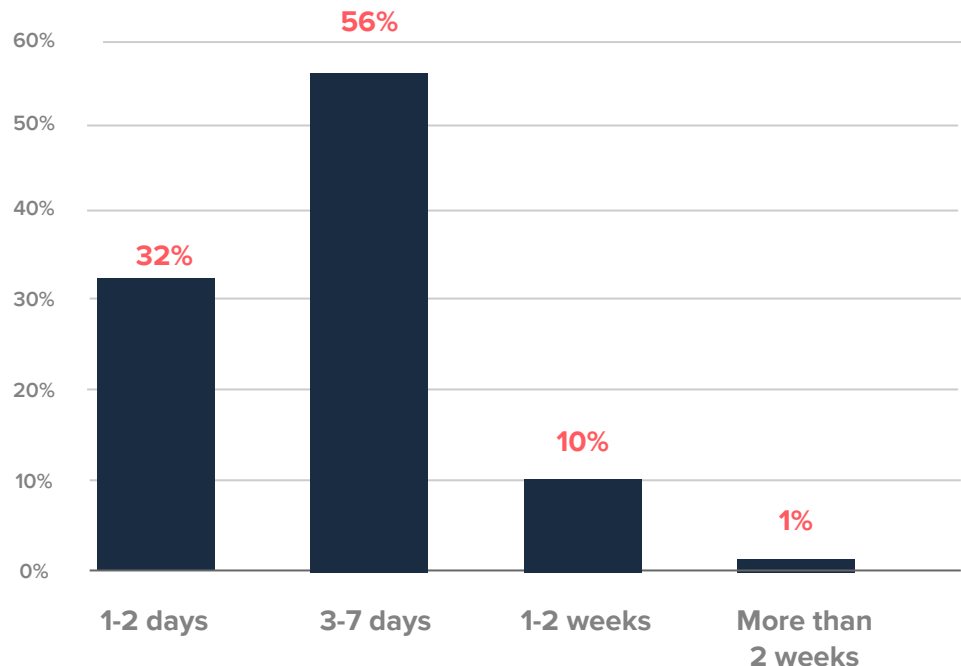
Most PR pros wait **3-7 days** to follow up with a journalist they have not heard back from

[The State of Journalism 2021](#)

found that **50%** of journalists prefer follow ups after 3-7 days and **36%** say 1-2 days, indicating that there's broad alignment with what PR pros consider OK.

The split between PR pros' choices also reflects that timing for follow ups may vary depending on the campaign, industry and past relationship with the journalist.

How long after an initial pitch is it OK to follow up with a journalist you have not heard back from?

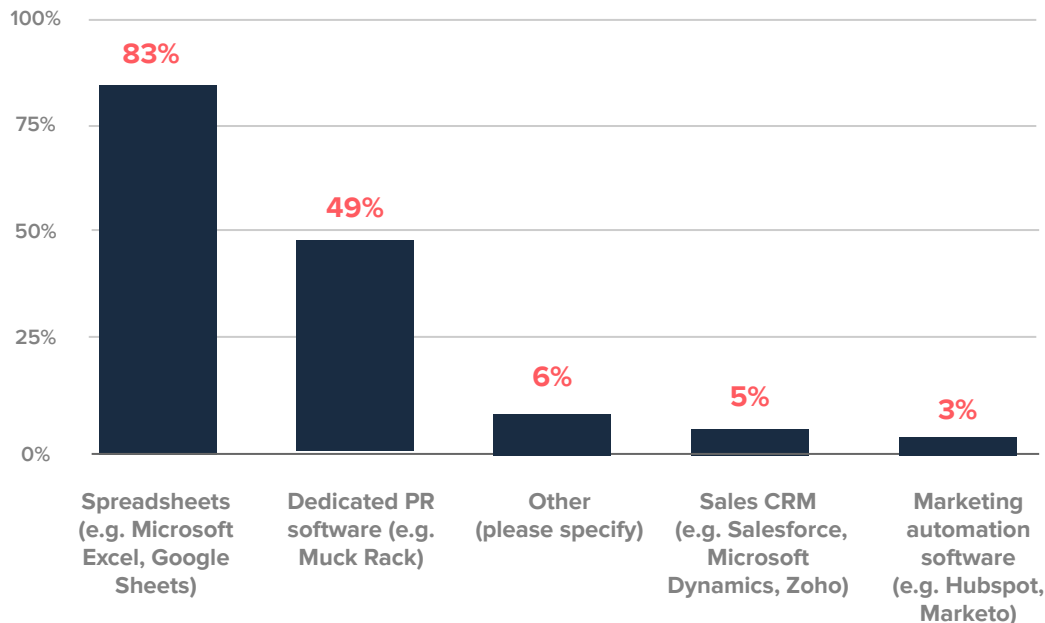


83% of PR pros still use spreadsheets to store media lists, followed by PR software

Overall, just as many PR pros are using spreadsheets to store media lists as reported one year ago in the State of PR 2020. Half use dedicated software.

70% of brands use spreadsheets and 50% use dedicated software. Agencies are slightly more likely to use spreadsheets to store media lists (87%) but are just as likely to also use a dedicated PR software (49%).

Where do you and your team store media lists? (select all that apply)



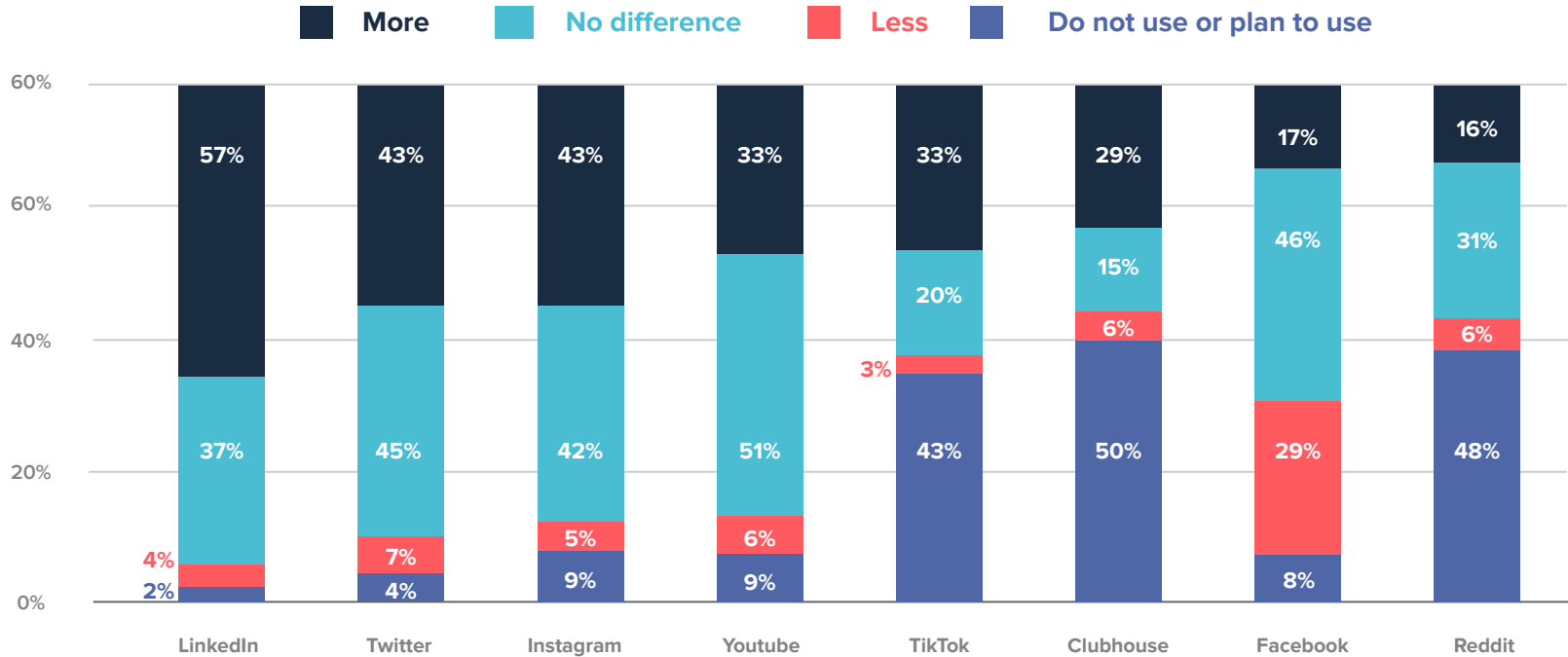


4

How do PR pros use social media?

Social media usage: LinkedIn takes the lead

Do you expect to spend more or less time on the following social networks this year?





Do you expect to spend more or less time on the following social networks this year?

The largest percentage of PR pros plan to use LinkedIn more, followed by Twitter and Instagram. Nearly a third plan to use Facebook less.

Agencies are slightly more excited than brands and nonprofits about TikTok (41% vs 25%) and Clubhouse (37% vs 20%).

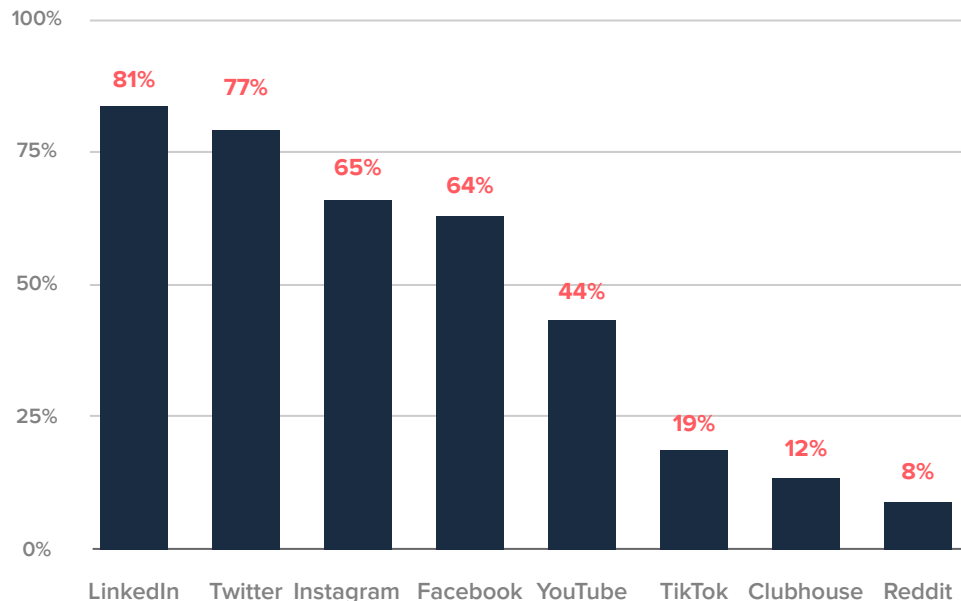
CXOs and VPs expect to spend more time on LinkedIn than Twitter over the next year (88% more vs 83% more).

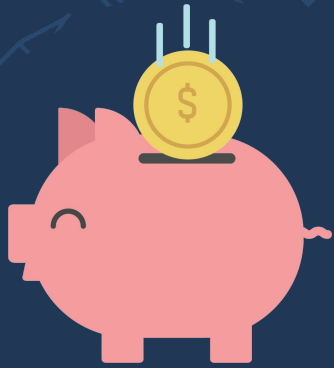
PR pros see LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook as most important to their company's social strategies

Brands and nonprofits are more likely to say Twitter (**83%** vs **72%** agencies), YouTube (**60%** vs **29%**) and Facebook (**73%** vs **55%**)

Agencies are more likely to say Clubhouse (**17%** vs **7%**) .

Which of the following social networks are important for your company's social media and communications strategy? (select all that apply)





5

How are PR budgets changing and how are teams allocating them?

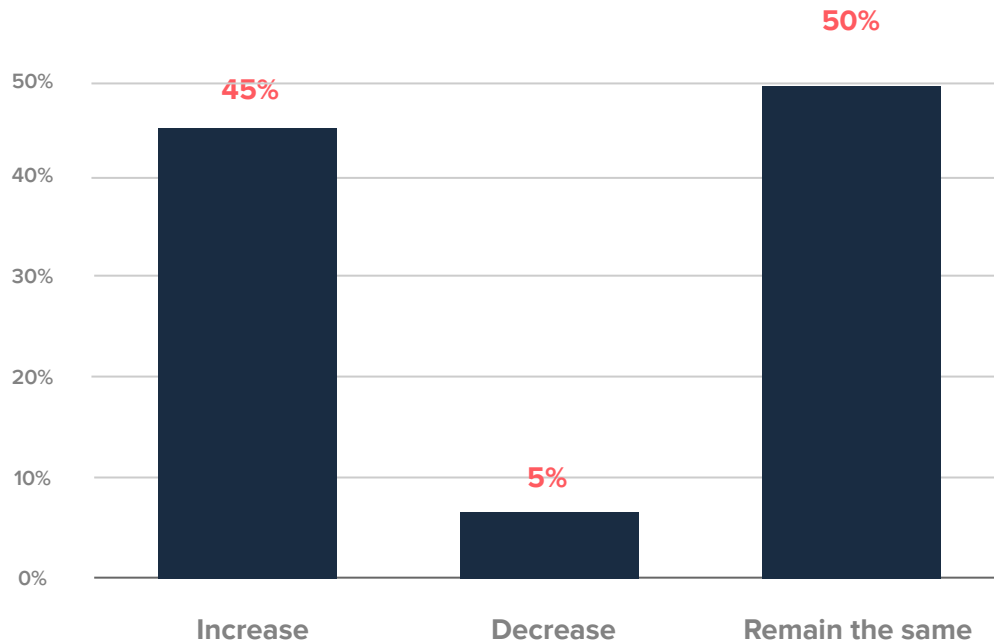
PR budgets:

95% of PR pros expect budgets to increase or remain the same

Across company types and sizes, most budgets are either increasing (**45%**) or staying the same (**50%**). Only **5%** of PR pros' budgets are decreasing.

Agencies are the most likely to say increasing (**49%** vs **46%** for brands and **30%** for nonprofits) or decreasing (**3%** vs **6%** for brands and **10%** for nonprofits).

Over the next year, my company's budget for communications/PR will:

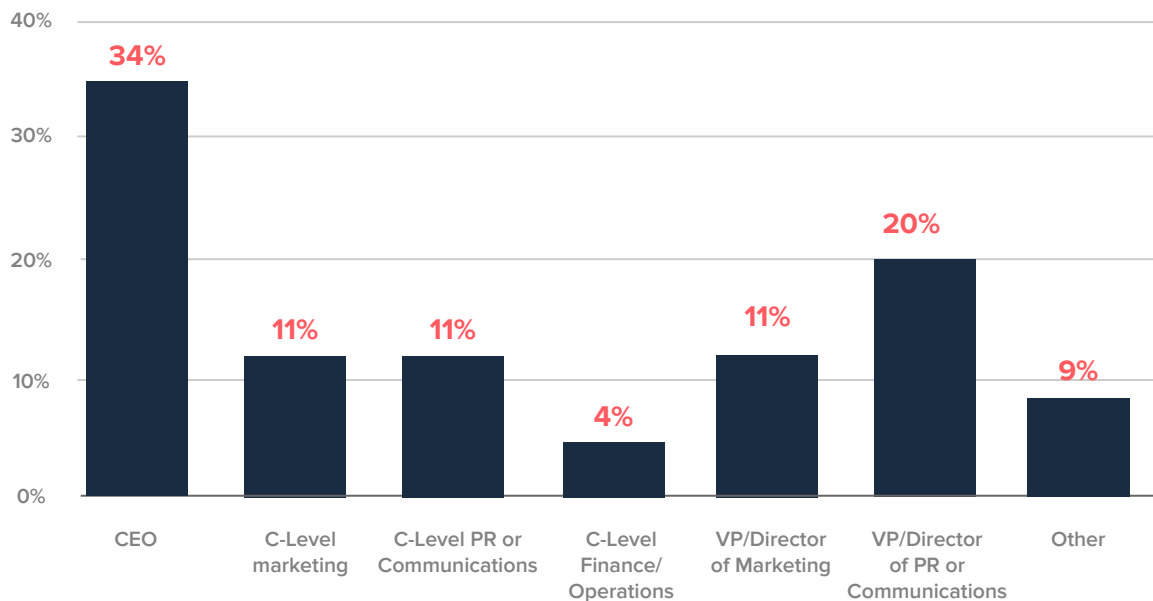


PR decision makers: CEOs, VPs of PR, and VPs of Marketing

CEO was the most-reported decision maker (**34%**), followed by the top communicator (**31%**) and top marketer (**22%**).

At large (500+) organizations, the decision maker is more likely to be the top communications professional (**53%**), followed by the top marketer (**24%**).

Who is your company's decision maker for spending on PR and earned media efforts?



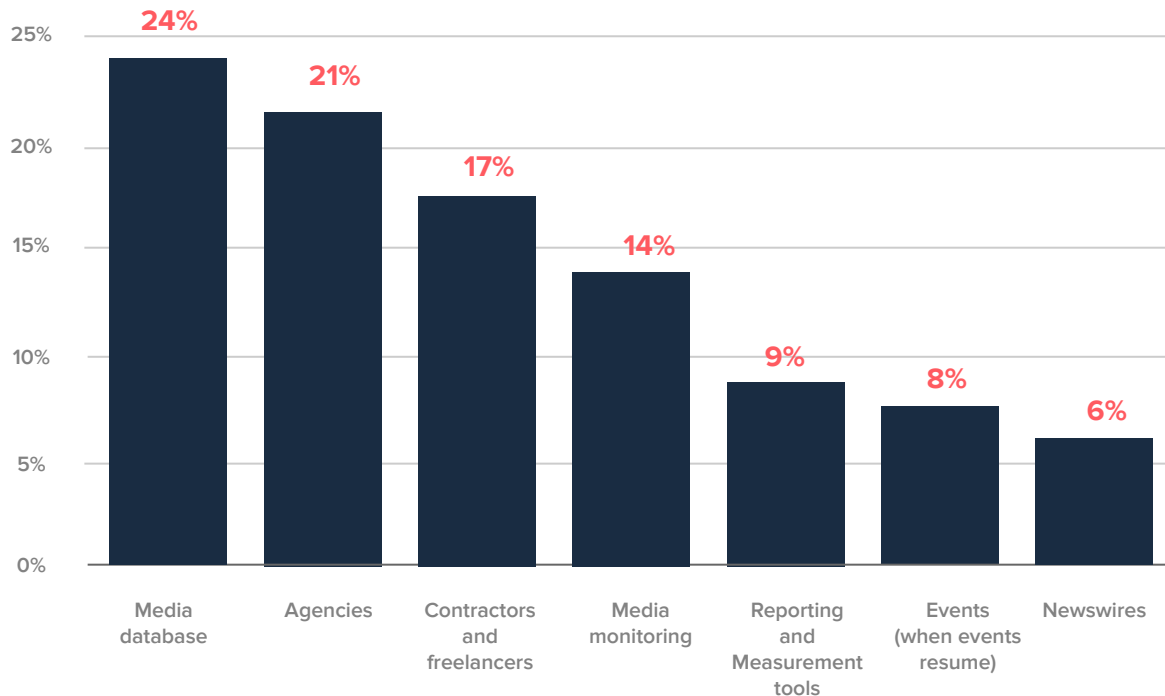
PR pros say their team is spending the most on media databases and agencies

31% of brands and nonprofits said they spend the most on agencies, followed by media databases **(18%)** and media monitoring **(15%)**.

Agencies said they spend the most on media databases **(27%)**, contractors and freelancers **(18%)** and media monitoring **(12%)**.

Responses were consistent with last year with the exception of owned events, which decreased from **19%** to **8%** this year.

Where do you spend the highest % of your PR budget (not including employee salary)?





6

How are PR teams measuring success?

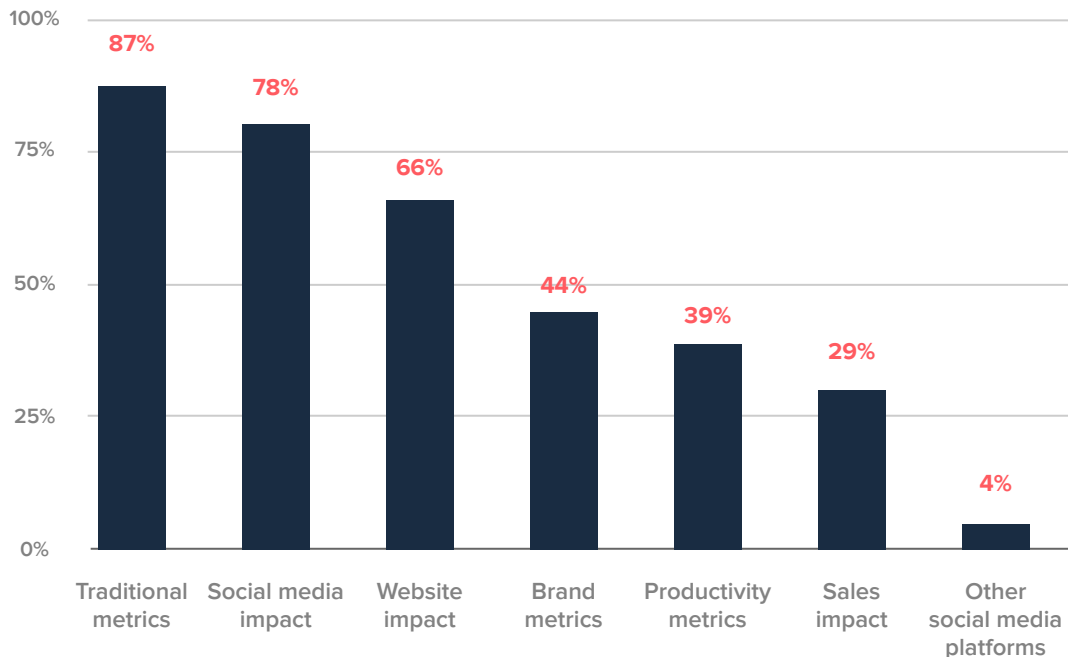
Most popular metrics: Traditional PR, social media, and website

Reporting on website impact grew to **66%** in 2021 from **52%** in 2020. Similarly, social media impact grew to **78%** in 2021 from **69%** in 2020.

Agencies are slightly more likely to use traditional PR metrics (**90%**) vs brands and nonprofits (**85%**). The same goes for productivity metrics (**41%** agency vs **36%** brand and nonprofit).

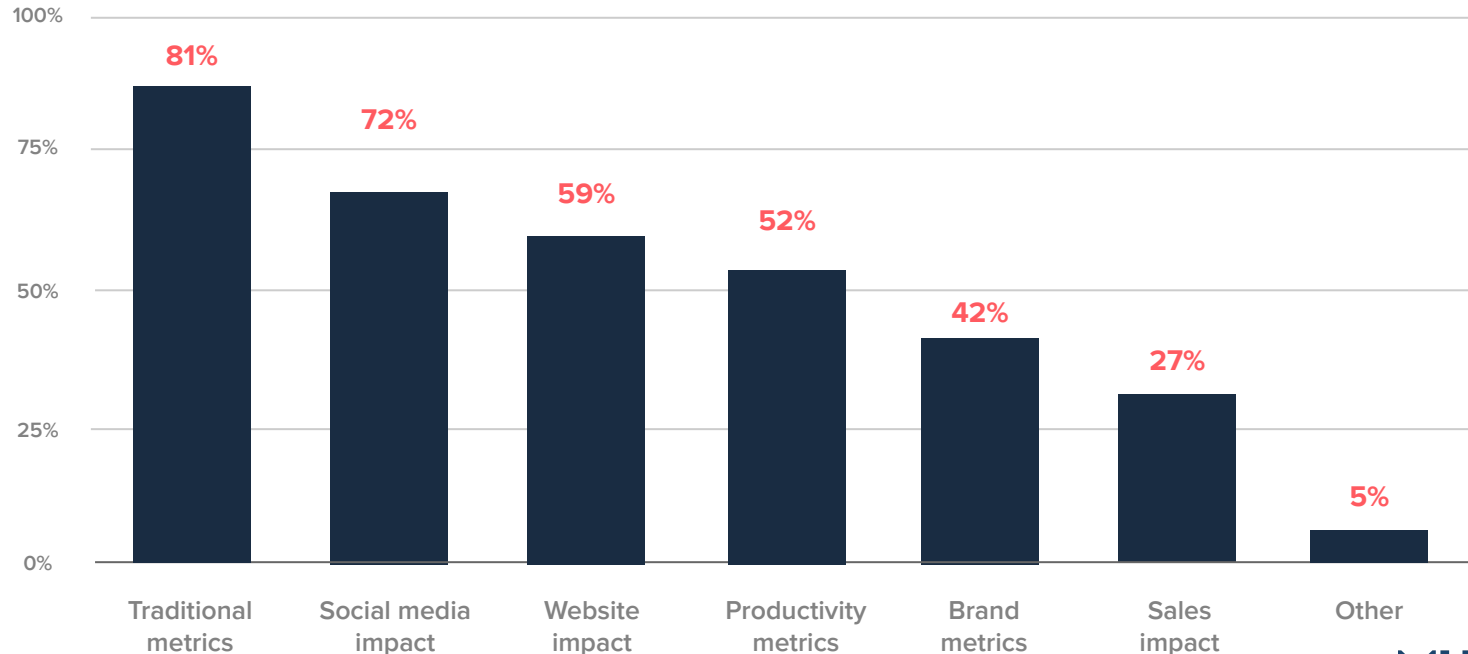
Meanwhile, brands are more likely than agencies and nonprofits to measure sales impact (**34%** vs **26%**) and brand metrics (**52%** vs **40%**).

Which of the following metrics do you use to showcase the success of your PR and communications efforts for stakeholders/executives/clients? (select all that apply)



PR's most popular internal metrics: traditional, social media, website, and productivity

Which of the following metrics does your PR/communications team use INTERNALLY to measure success? (select all that apply)





Which of the following metrics does your PR/communications team use INTERNALLY to measure success?

PR teams generally use the same types of metrics to communicate success to stakeholders as they do internally as a team.

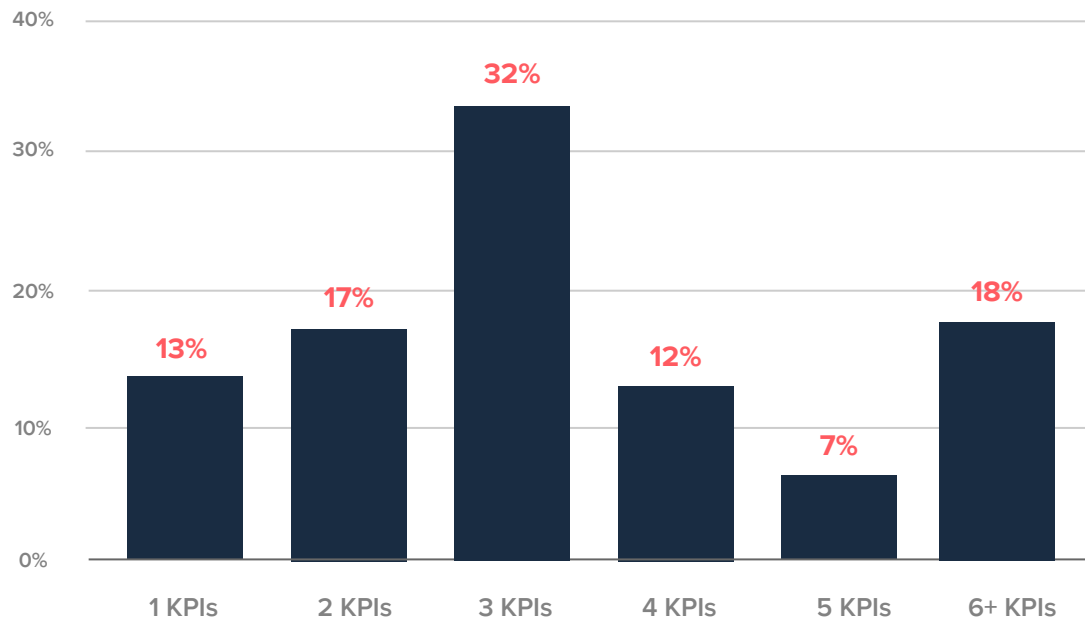
Agencies are more likely to use productivity metrics both internally (57%) and externally (41%), while brands and non-profits use productivity metrics 48% of the time internally and 36% of the time externally.

The average PR team has 3 core key performance indicators (KPIs)

It is most common for PR pros to have 3 KPIs (**32%**), followed by 6 or more KPIs (**18%**).

This is relatively consistent across brands, agencies and nonprofits (+/-**3%**).

How many metrics/key performance indicators (KPIs) is your team responsible for?

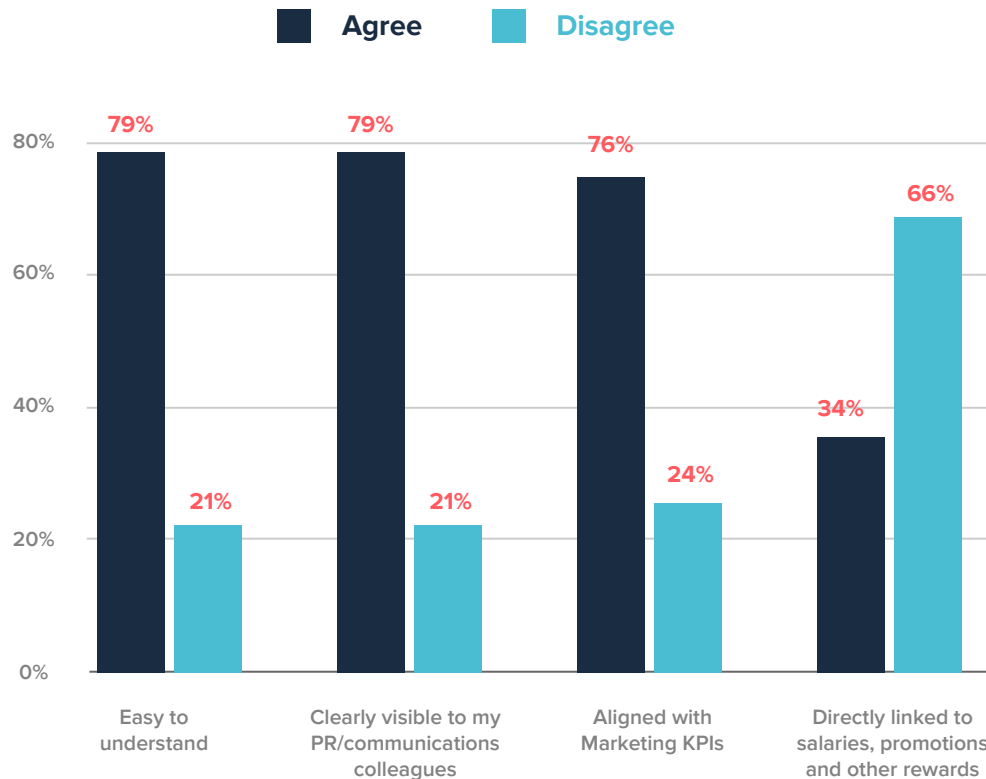


PR/communication teams believe their KPIs are clear

PR teams generally believe their metrics are easy to understand and aligned with marketing. Only a little over a third have KPIs directly linked to salaries, promotions and other rewards.

Agencies are **8%** more likely to think their KPIs are clearly visible and **5%** more likely to think they're easy to understand compared to brands and nonprofits.

My PR/communication team's main metrics/KPIs are:

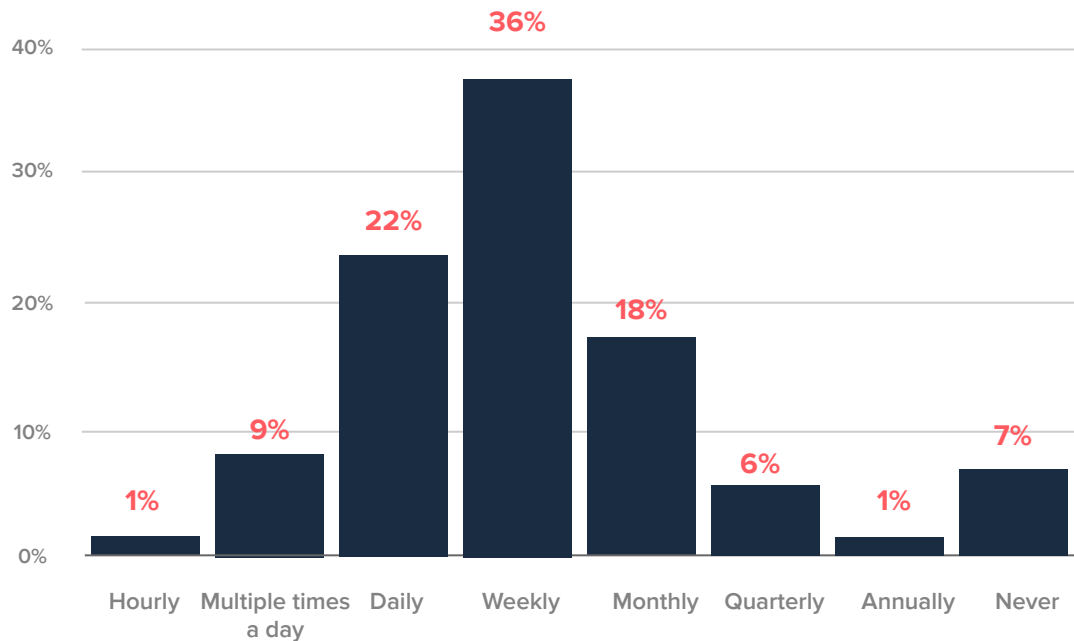


Most PR pros check PR analytics and reporting weekly, followed by daily

33% of brands and nonprofits check PR reporting at least once daily, **36%** weekly, **17%** monthly and **6%** quarterly.

31% of agencies check reporting daily, **37%** weekly, **18%** monthly and **5%** quarterly.

How often do you check PR analytics/reporting?

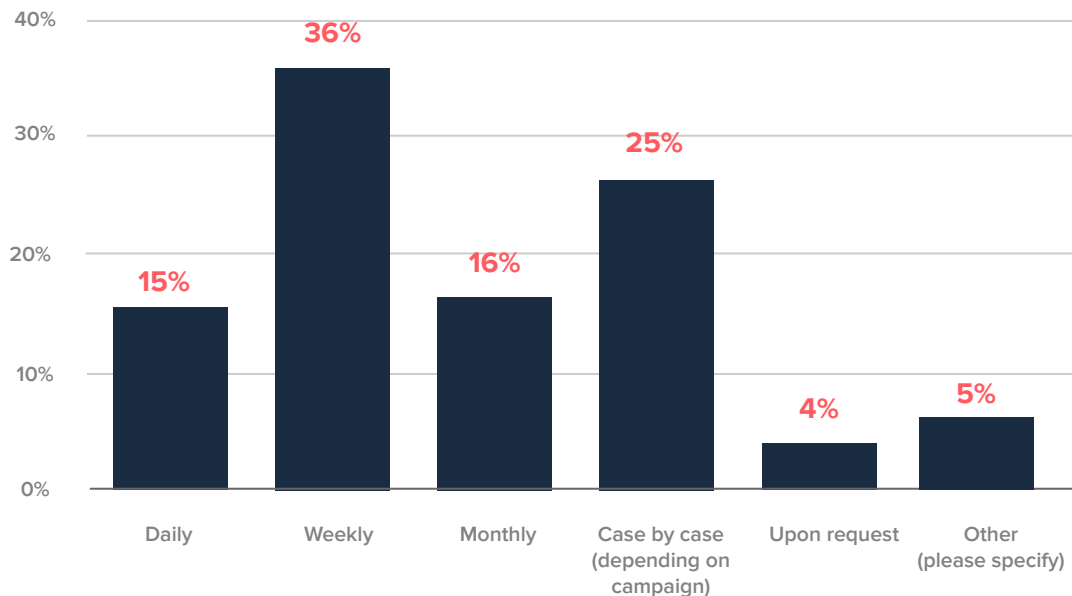


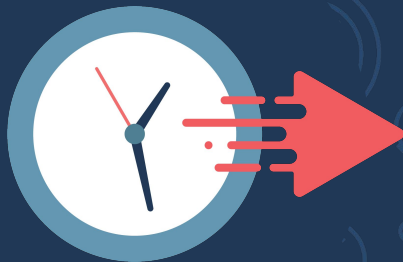
Most PR teams hold executive briefings weekly or case by case

Most PR teams are holding weekly briefings (**36%**), followed by **25%** case by case (depending on campaign), **16%** monthly, **15%** daily, **5%** other, and **4%** upon request.

This is consistent across brand, nonprofits and agencies, as well as different company sizes.

How often is your executive team briefed on PR and communications activities?





7

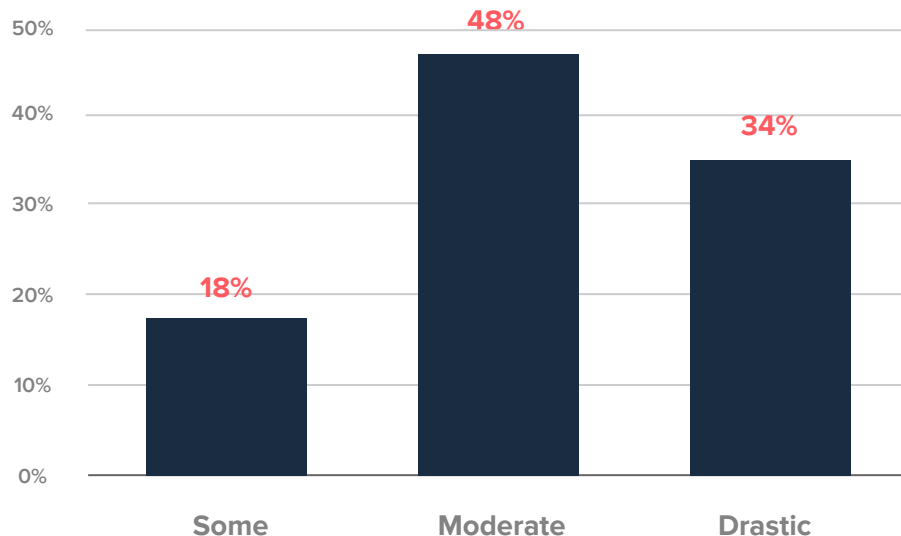
What is the future of PR?

Most PR pros anticipate moderate to drastic change in the next 5 years

Brands and nonprofits believe similar at: 21% of brands and non profits believe there will be some change, while 49% expect moderate and 30% expect drastic change.

Meanwhile, 14% of agencies expect some change, 14% expect moderate and 38% expect drastic change.

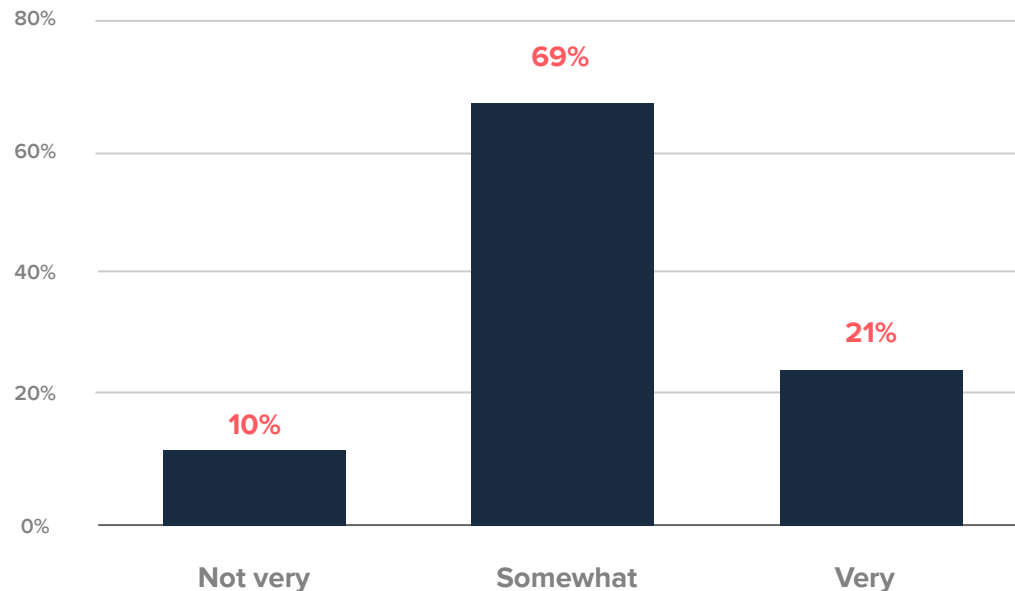
How much change do you expect to see in the PR industry in the next 5 years?



69% of PR pros believe they are somewhat prepared for the industry changes ahead

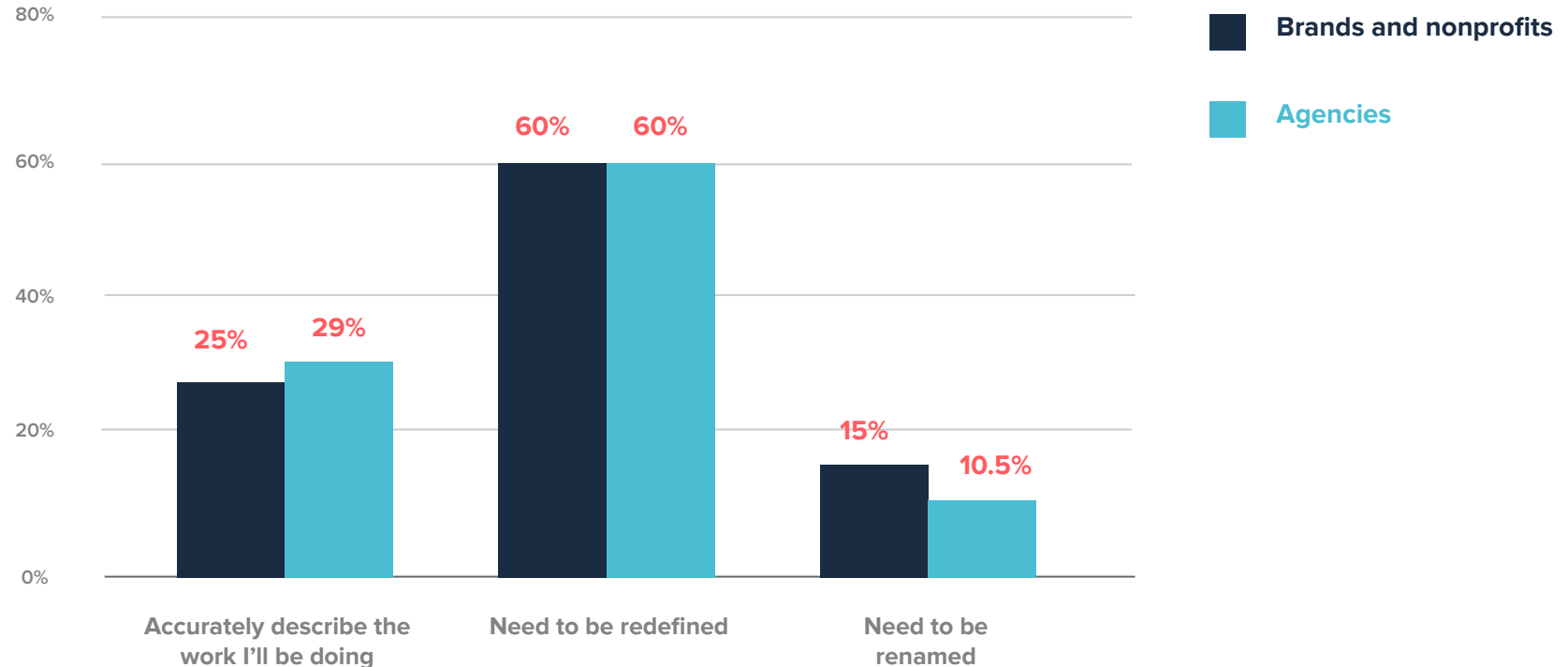
Across company sizes and types, most PR pros believe they are somewhat prepared for the change ahead.

How prepared are you for this level of change?



73% of PR pros believe “public relations” will need to be redefined in 5 years

In 5 years, the term “public relations” will...

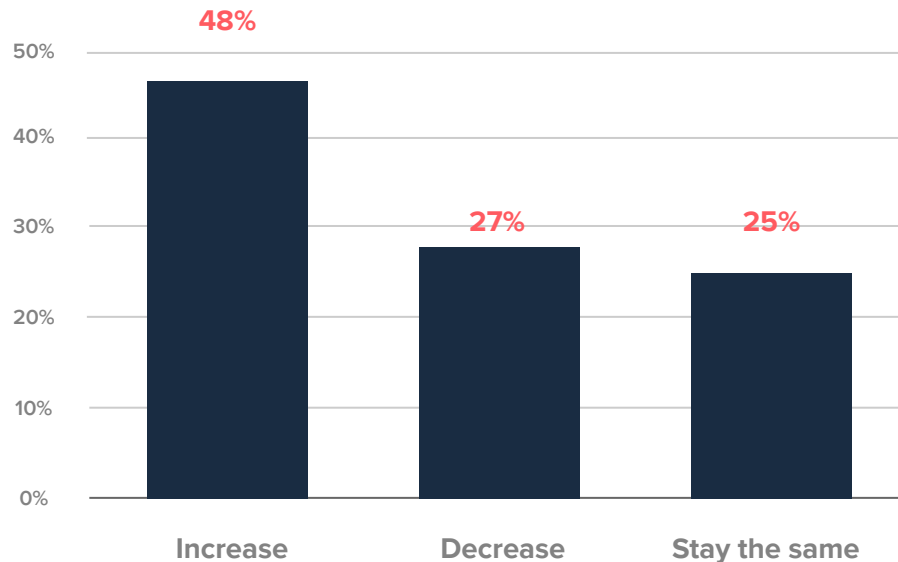


Nearly half of PR pros believe the number of agencies will increase over the next 5 years

45% of brands and nonprofits, as well as **51%** of agencies, say the total number of agencies will increase.

PR pros from companies with fewer than 500 employees are more likely to predict an increase of agencies (**52%** for 1-500 employees, **42%** for 500+ employees).

Over the next 5 years, the total number of PR/communications agencies will...

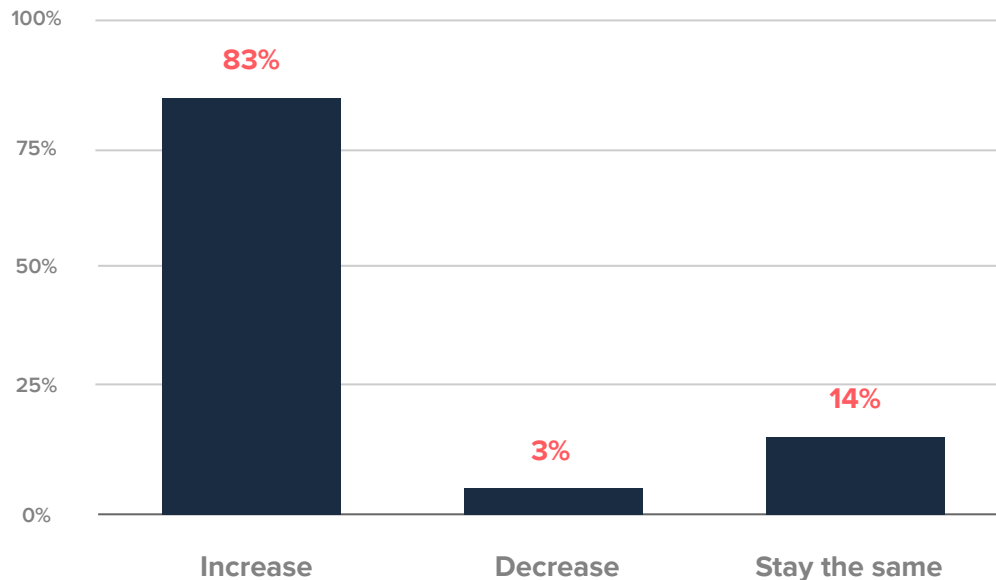


83% believe the importance of the PR/communications function will grow in the next 5 years

Only **3%** of PR Pros do not think the importance of the PR/communications function will grow in the next 5 years.

82% of brands and nonprofits, as well as **84%** of agencies, agree the importance of PR/communications will grow.

The importance of the PR/communications function will grow in the next 5 years



PR pros predict strategic planning, media relations, and social media to remain top skills for PR success in the next 5 years

Which of the following skills will be important to your PR organization's success in the next 5 years?





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Strategic planning is the top skill PR pros see as important to their organization's success in the next 5 years, followed by media relations and social media. DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) ranks next.

Additionally, PR pros are valuing written communications (65%) over verbal communications (32%).

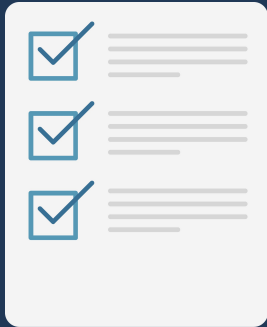
Thank you!

Muck Rack's Public Relations Management (PRM) platform enables PR teams to find the right journalists for their stories, send customized pitches, build meaningful relationships with the media, monitor news and quantify their impact.

[Learn more](#)

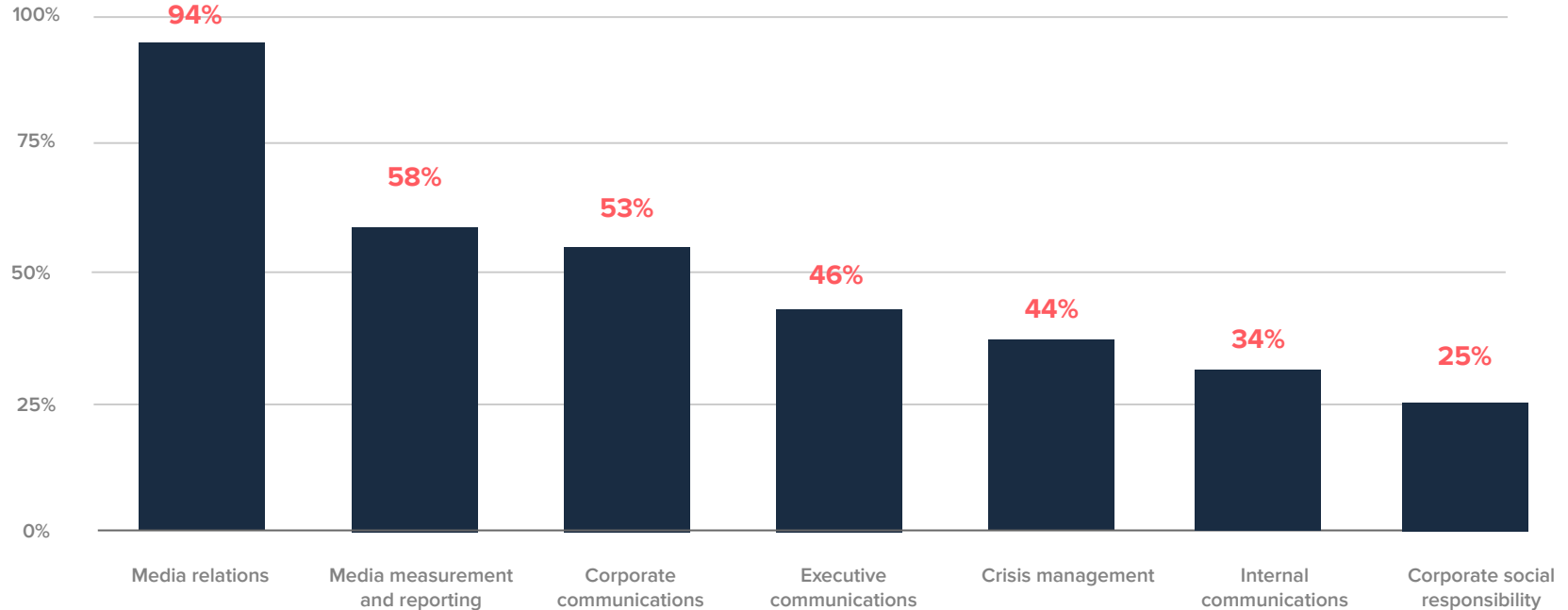
MUCK RACK

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Appendix: Expanded audience breakdown

What is your focus as a PR/communications professional (select all that apply)



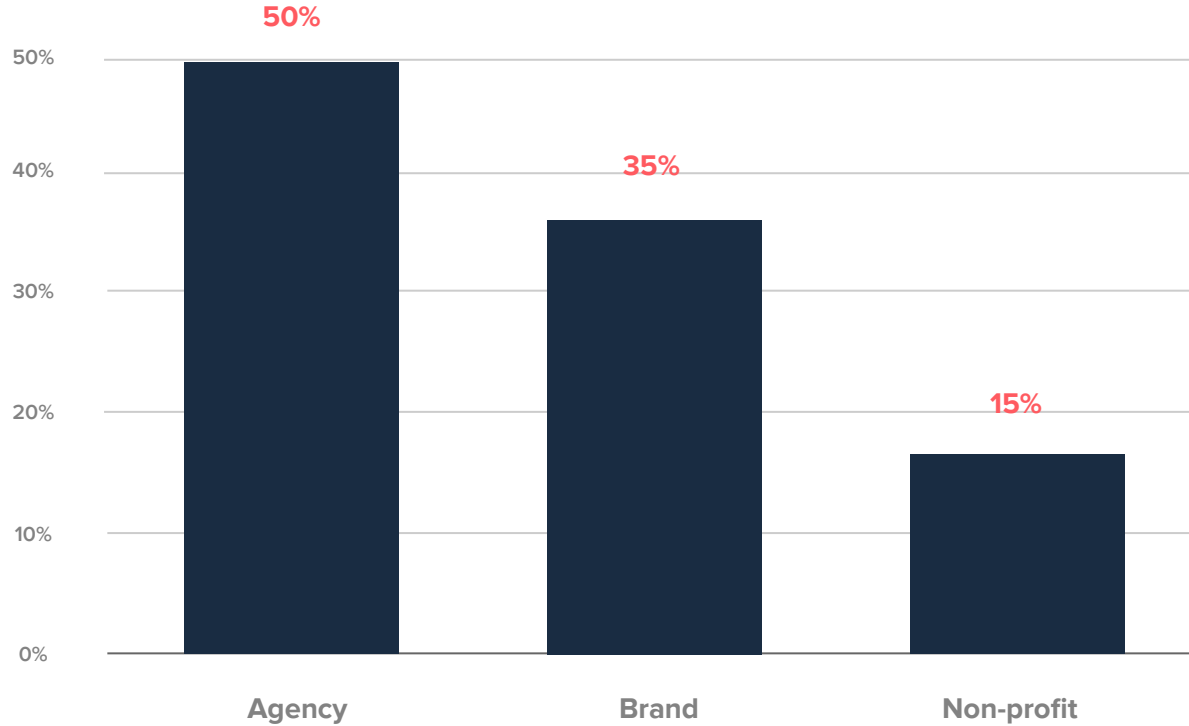


What is your focus as a PR/communications professional

Media relations is thriving and remains at the heart of PR. The vast majority (94%) of PR pros do some form of media relations. Agency PR pros tend to have 3 focuses while brands and non-profits have 4. These focuses vary considerably.

PR pros from brands and nonprofits are more likely to focus on corporate communications (67% vs 46% for agencies) and measurement and reporting (64% vs 52% for agencies).

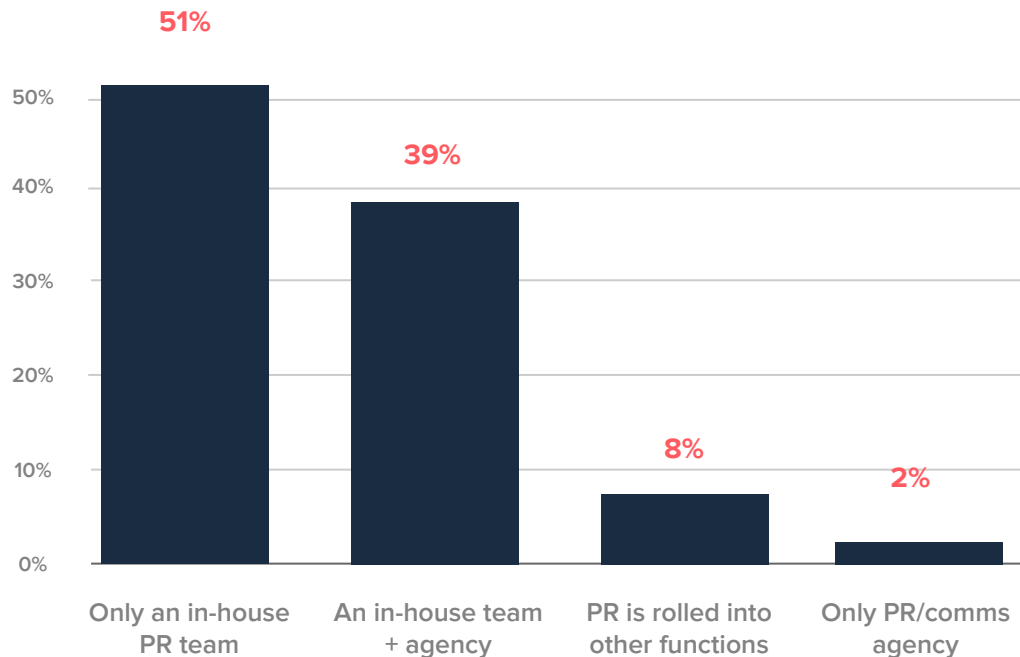
Which of the following best describes where you work?



Brands and Nonprofits:

My organization's PR is managed by:

51% of brands and nonprofits say they only have an in-house PR team, **39%** say they have an in-house team and agency, **8%** say PR is rolled into other functions, and **2%** say the only a PR/comms agency.

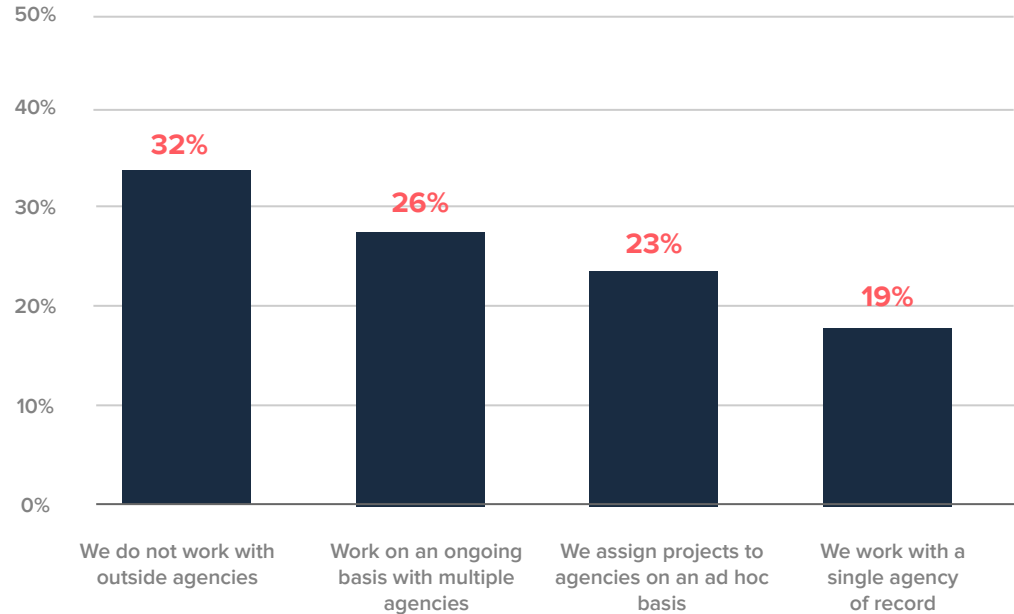


32% of brands and nonprofits do not work with outside agencies, **19%** work with a single agency of record, **26%** work on an ongoing basis with multiple agencies and **23%** assign agencies on an ad hoc basis.

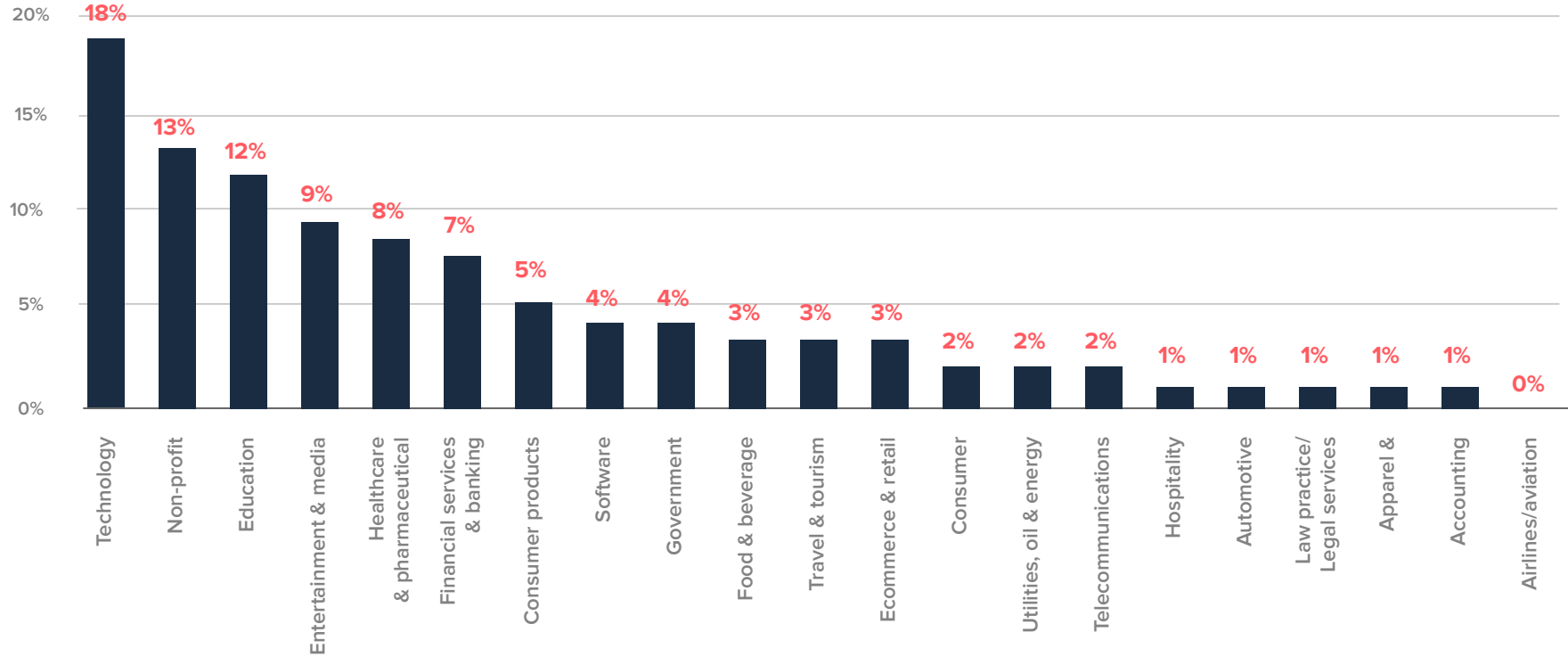
Organizations with more than 500 employees are more likely to work on an ongoing basis with multiple agencies (**37%**), with **24%** ad hoc and 20% with one agency of record. Almost all (**85%**) brands with over 5000 employees have at least one agency.

Brands under 500 employees are more likely to assign projects on an ad hoc basis (**22%**), though **18%** work with multiple agencies and 18% have one agency of record. **41%** don't work with agencies at all.

Brands and Nonprofits: How do you work with agencies?



Which of the following best describes the industry of your organization?





Which of the following best describes the industry of your organization?

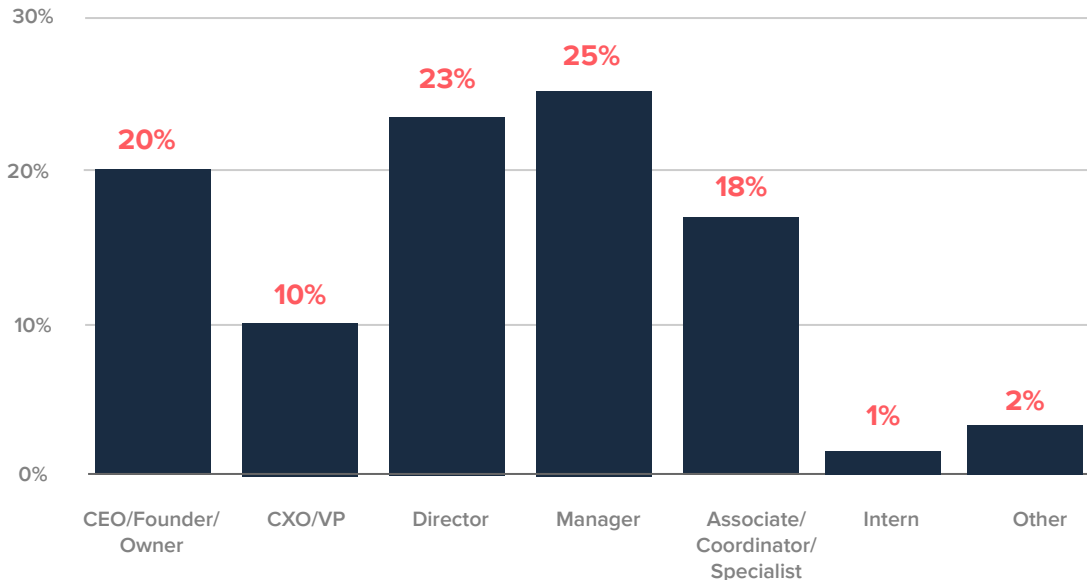
Education, Technology and Healthcare/ Biotechnology/ Pharmaceuticals are the largest organizations in this survey on average (most with 500 and 5k+ employees).

Nonprofits, technology and entertainment, media and publishing had the most responses from organizations under 500 employees.

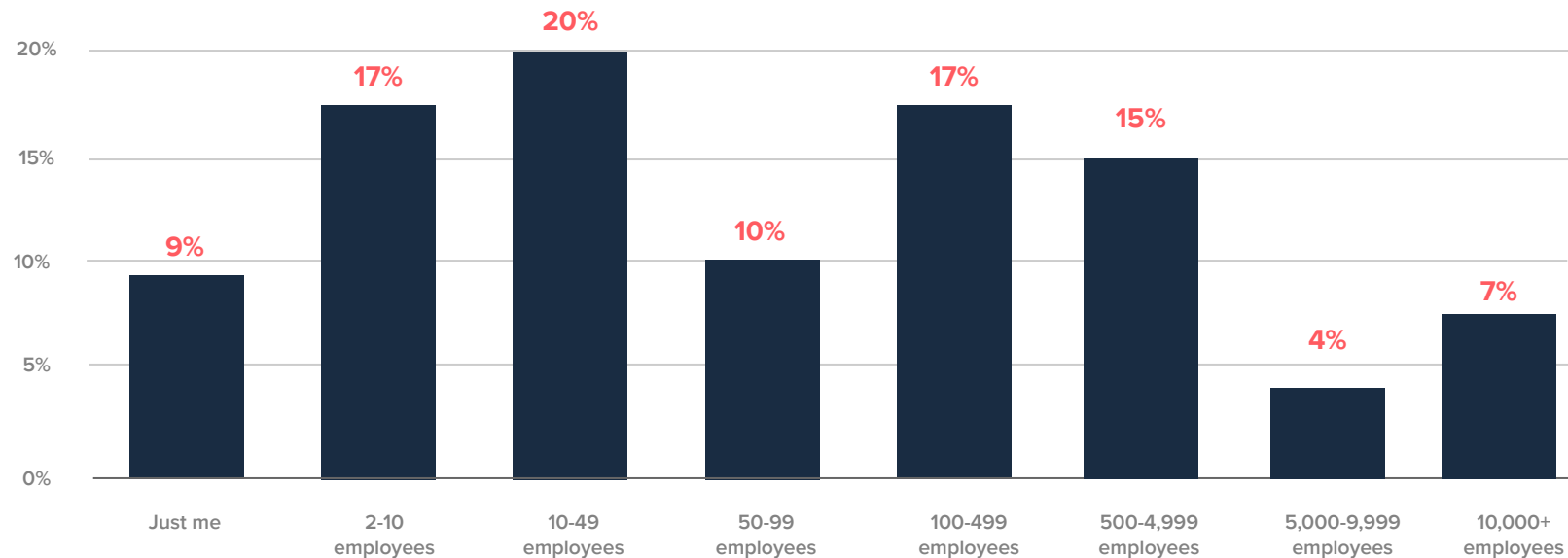
What best describes your level in your company?

20% CEO/Founder/Owner, **25%** manager, **23%** Director, **18%** Associate/Coordinator/Specialist, **10%** CXO/VP, **2%** other, **1%** intern

All but one CEO/founder/owner is from an agency under 100 employees. Looking at companies over 100 employees, **34%** are managers, **28%** director, **24%** coordinator/specialist, **12%** CXO/VP and **2%** other.



How many people work at your company?





How many people work at your company?

Nearly 80% of PR pros surveyed from agencies are from organizations with fewer than 50 employees.

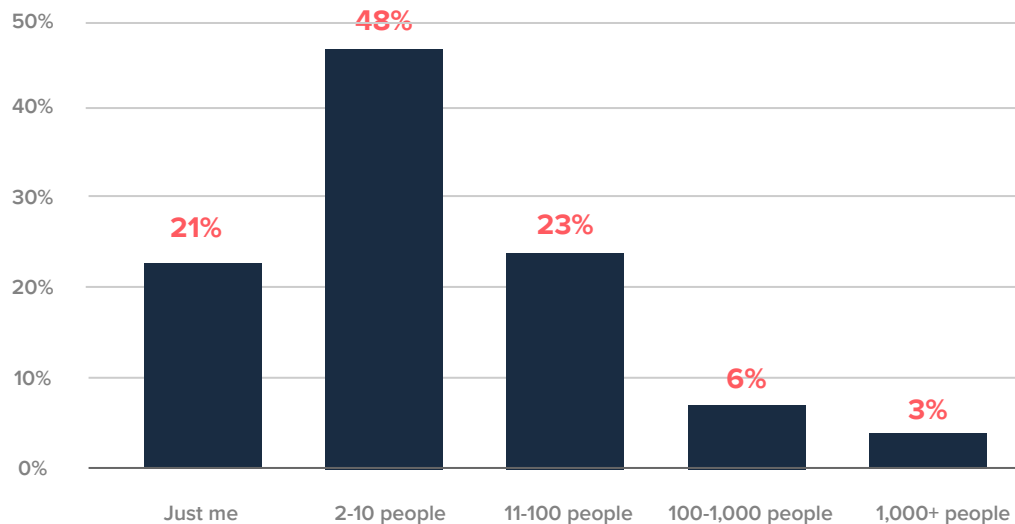
Meanwhile over 74% of PR pros from brands are part of companies over 100 employees, with 22% from organizations with 5000+ employees.

Nonprofit responses were split 56% from companies above 100 employees.

How large is your entire company's PR/communications team?

Among agencies, **17%** said they are solo PR pros, **41%** said there are 2-10 people on their team and **28%** said there are 11-100 people on their team.

PR pros from brands said that **28%**, **51%** are on teams of 2-10 and **16%** are on teams of 11-100.



What best describes your company's average annual revenue?

