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Report: PR Industry on Track for Employment Growth

STACEY WIEDOWER | Special to The Daily News *Updated 3:19PM* 12 67

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Public relations is on track to becoming one of the nation's fastest-growing professions, with a 24 percent rise in employment predicted by 2018, according to a recent New York Times report.

The reasons for the rise are clear to [Amy Howell](#), CEO of Memphis-based Howell Marketing Strategies. Businesses that initially reacted to the recession by slashing advertising budgets have realized the value of a comprehensive marketing strategy.

"It's time for PR and marketing to marry each other again," she said. "In the '90s, they kind of split. With social media and the Internet and information 24-7 at your fingertips, you can't separate them anymore.

"There's never a good time to stop telling your story. Now you have to tell it yourself, faster than ever before."

Courtney Liebenrood Ellett, principal of Memphis-based Obsidian Public Relations, said the past year has been one of significant growth for her company – the 5-year-old firm gained new clients, added staff and underwent two office expansions.

"Even during a recession – or maybe because of the recession – I'm seeing more and more companies and not-for-profits turn to PR firms for strategic counseling and execution," Liebenrood Ellett said. "A strong public relations partner can be one of the most important competitive advantages for a company. More and more business owners are beginning to better understand the tangible value of our discipline and what it offers in a long-term fashion."

She cited a study by Context Analytics that found that PR has a bigger impact on a company's bottom line than any other marketing or communications activity.

"People may be cutting advertising budgets, but we're finding that the ones coming on board with us are expanding their PR spending," she said.

Spending in the area rose by 7.1 percent in 2008, according to a VSS Communications Industry Forecast. Another industry report found that PR spending is expected to increase 17 percent by 2016, compared to a 6 percent rise in advertising spending.

"I think the reason for the growth (in the PR field) is because people realize they can't just rely on advertising anymore," Howell said. "Now you have the social media component, and you have to advertise some and you have to tell your story through the media, so PR is very important. If you had a toolkit and were told, 'You can have one thing in here; what's it going to be,' I'd pick the PR plan over anything else.

"It's one thing to get good publicity and another thing to leverage it."

Memphis-based [Red Rover Co.](#), which offers sales training along with PR and marketing services, has seen client demand for PR services rise across the board. The agency is looking to add a full-time PR professional to its staff.

"In the recession, we found that the services clients tended to be most

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PROPERTY SALES	23	52	632
MORTGAGES	75	151	1,386
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	58	669
BUILDING PERMITS	0	66	1,318
BANKRUPTCIES	65	170	730
BUSINESS LICENSES	35	58	288
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	92	232	1,092
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interested in were our sales training and coaching services,” said managing partner [Lori Turner](#). “But as we’ve seen that uptick in training, marketing and PR have held pretty close.”

Along with increased demand for PR services, Liebenrood Ellett added, there’s increased demand for PR jobs.

“I’m seeing a greater number than ever before in terms of resumes and inquiries about employment and internships,” she said.

For a single job posting in 2010, the company received more than 1,000 resumes.

“A lot were local,” Liebenrood Ellett said. “But I’d say it was 50-50 local and across the nation, from Seattle to Miami to New York to Phoenix. There are a lot of individuals out there looking for PR jobs.”

And good PR talent – people with the right combination of writing ability, people skills and sales ability – is hard to find, Turner said.

“Students coming out of journalism school have learned strategy and they’ve learned copywriting, but if they can’t make the pitch, none of that writing matters,” she said.

And the new economy coupled with the new world of social media, she said, means the ability to bridge that gap will become more valuable than ever.

“I think as we continue to rely on this instantaneous news process, over time we’re going to see the need for PR people get even higher,” Turner said.

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