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*"I work in a large professional consultancy with a fun and friendly small company feel. I joined a consultancy because it gives you a variety of experience across different client accounts and sometimes different disciplines. It also gives you the opportunity to work in a large team with experienced people you can learn from."*

## WORKING IN A PR CONSULTANCY

This chapter tells you a little more about the PR industry and discusses the difference between in-house PR and PR consultancy. If you already have a good idea about working in PR then you might want to move on to the next section which discusses whether you have the right skills.

Those looking for a career in PR can take one of two main routes: by getting a job within a PR department of a company or organisation, known as **in-house** PR, or by finding a position in a PR consultancy.

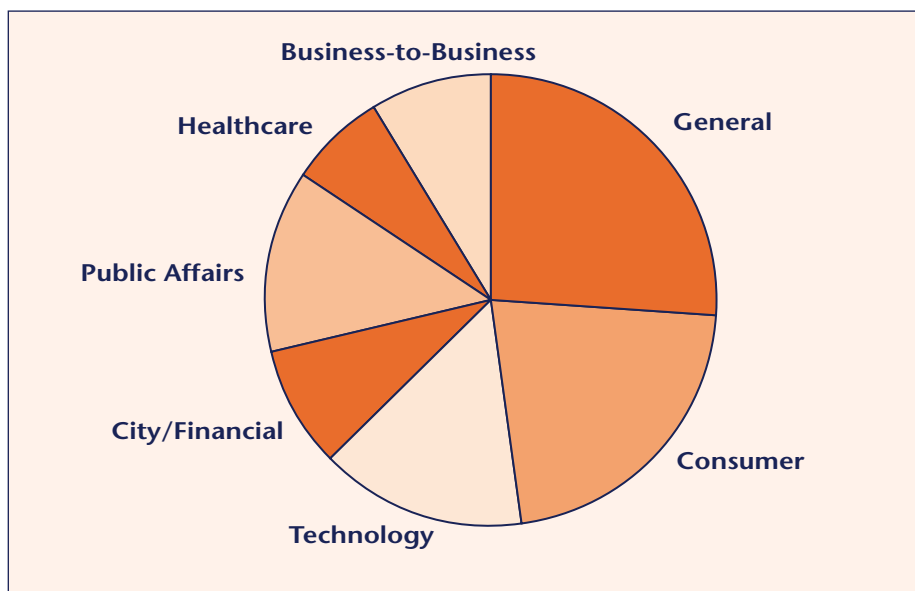
The PR consultancies in the UK range from US-owned giants, employing thousands of people worldwide, to privately owned companies operating with only a handful of full-time staff. The buyers of PR consultancy tend to be in-house PR, marketing or communications departments of other private businesses or the public sector, like local authorities.

### PR CONSULTANCY: A PROFILE

If you decide to choose the consultancy route, then it's worth knowing that PR companies often fall into two categories: **full service**, where a full range of PR disciplines are on offer or **specialist**, where a consultancy might specialise in certain industries or PR disciplines like crisis management.

### WHAT TYPE OF WORK DO PR CONSULTANCIES DO?

The graph below illustrates the different PR disciplines offered by PR consultancies



Source: PRCA Frontline Survey 2001

### HOW DOES A CONSULTANCY DIFFER FROM AN IN-HOUSE PR DEPARTMENT?

The following points offer a useful illustration:

- **Client Contracts** – A consultancy is **contracted** to deliver bespoke PR services to any number of companies or 'clients' of any discipline. Account teams within a full service consultancy, for instance, might undertake corporate, consumer, trade, financial or even crisis management PR according to a client's individual needs. (See Chapter 3 for individual category definitions). In-house PR professionals, in contrast, are the clients, undertaking a PR programme for their own specific company. In-house PR teams might have to oversee other marketing functions like advertising and direct marketing.
- **Standards** – PRCA member consultancies have to meet strict entry criteria and are bound by codes of practice. In addition the PRCA's Consultancy Management Standard (CMS) is an external assessment based on business proficiency and all members must pass in order to join the trade association. In-house PR departments are not subject to such PR industry regulations as the Consultancy Management Standard, although some individuals within the organisation might be members of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) which ensures individual practitioners are bound by professional codes of conduct. In-house PR departments might also have to work to other standards or codes related to their own specific industries.

- **Evaluation** – PR consultancies, similar to other marketing disciplines, need to prove the value of their work, and in so doing, justify their fees! They do this through both internal and external evaluation programmes to assess the success of a specific project or on-going PR programme. Before a project commences, evaluation starts at the planning stage using research to establish the client objectives in order to develop the right strategy. Measurement and evaluation is then carried out once the programme is completed in order to help a client and consultancy plan future activity accordingly. For more details, please visit the evaluation information site, [www.pre-fix.org.uk](http://www.pre-fix.org.uk).

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WORKING IN A CONSULTANCY?

PR consultancy work offers some incredible opportunities for graduates as the following points make clear:

- **Experience** – A consultancy offers newcomers to the industry an excellent grounding in fundamental PR practices. Graduate trainee programmes, in particular, are an excellent platform from which to gain varied experience with different sectors and clients. The very nature of in-house PR, on the other hand, makes it sector specific and offers little room for manoeuvre. For this reason, many PR professionals move in-house later on in their careers, once they've established their chosen PR specialism.
- **Speed** – Juggling a range of clients as well as talking to a wide range of audiences, including the media, means that PR professionals must think fast and be ready for anything.
- **Team Spirit** – A successful consultancy depends on team work. Different clients are handled by different account teams which are usually made up of five or six people of varying experience. On average, a PR account executive would work on four separate accounts.
- **Variety** – A typical day might start with a client meeting in the morning, a photoshoot after lunch and then press release writing for a new product launch. Often you will be required to liaise with external suppliers like designers or mailing houses. This is all invaluable experience in recognising where PR fits into the broader marketing picture
- **Financial Benefits** – The sort of PR salary you could expect is detailed in Chapter 4, however it is worth noting some of the other financial benefits consultancies can provide. Many consultancies offer share options in the company as well as pension schemes and health insurance. It is a good idea to investigate the benefits on offer when searching for a job.
- **Entrepreneurship** – PR attracts bright, talented people with strong individual personalities. Many PR practitioners set up their own private consultancies and some larger firms offer their own budding "Richard Bransons" a chance to start up specialist divisions or subsidiary companies. The opportunities for entrepreneurship are plentiful in this young industry.
- **Social Life** – Having explored the various career and financial benefits of consultancy work, what you really want to know is the kind of social life you can expect. Consultancies attract like-minded, young people and consequently foster a fun and stimulating environment in which to work. Some of the larger consultancies have their own bars or break-out rooms, or at least beer fridges, and actively encourage evening socialising.



**Derek Harris**  
Senior Account Manager  
Republic  
PR and Business graduate

*"I have always preferred to work in a consultancy than in-house. The fact that you have a variety of clients helps you learn new approaches to day-to-day PR techniques; writing, selling-in stories, managing staff, working out strategies and interpersonal client skills. However, you don't always feel like this when you've got to juggle three demanding clients simultaneously – I have been known to swear!"*



**Jason Lees**  
Account Executive  
Haslimann Taylor  
Law graduate

*"I chose a consultancy over in-house work because of the range of clients that consultancy life brings. The most gratifying aspect of my time at Haslimann Taylor has been watching a campaign snowball from regional to national, to international coverage within the space of a few hours. When you've got a good story, things move very fast."*