

Public Relations Firms Bounce Back

Communications Spending, PR Firm Staffing Both Up

By KARI HAMANAKA

Orange County public relations firms are making up for lost time—and work.

More and more marketers are spending after 2020's pullback, and many PR firms are bouncing back in lock step.

The group of 20 PR firms on this year's Business Journal ranking of the largest agencies here collectively reported 322 full-time employees in the county, which is up 14.2% from a year earlier. Ten have increased their workforce, two reported a decline, seven were flat and one declined to report.

Orange-based **Westbound Communications** Partner **Linda Shipkey Martin** noted more projects placed on hold in 2020 are now resuming, and the company is seeing more activity from government agencies with the work ranging from COVID outreach to digital and corporate communications.

"The first five months of 2021 have been incredibly busy," Martin said. "Especially with requests for proposals for new projects."

Pivoting With Clients

New approaches were born out of last year's challenges.

"When the state first shut everything down last March, I'm not going to lie, it was near instant panic for everyone, espe-

cially in the food and hospitality sphere," said **Kat Nguyen-DeAngelis**, the founder and head of Irvine independent agency **FWD PR**.

Nguyen, a former **Orange County Register** reporter who has served as PR manager at **South Coast Plaza** and managed press for the **Irvine Co.**'s retail portfolio, said many clients paused worked almost immediately at the start of the pandemic.

Nguyen-DeAngelis continued pitching client stories about business pivots or provided help with social media. Her husband, who had been assisting with administrative tasks, also began doing more with client relations and shooting content for clients.

Work began coming back about a month into the pandemic, along with new clients for FWD.

"Where we are now compared to last year, we have nearly doubled our client roster and it's going to be a really busy year and I am going to need to hire help soon," Nguyen-DeAngelis said.

"But we're so grateful for our clients and we feel hopeful about the future and that all of our clients can rebound and recover.

future clients. This emphasis in looking at how PR impacts brands and bottom lines have been well received by clients."



Shana Starr
CEO
Bastion Elevate



Kat Nguyen-DeAngelis
Founder
FWD PR



Linda Martin
Partner
Westbound Communications

Now Hiring

When the pandemic hit, Starr said business was lost from restaurant industry franchisees, but the firm still retained all of its staff and picked up new accounts. The result is the company's Newport Beach office since COVID has increased to 15 people, with another two in Los Angeles. September saw the opening of a Boston office to service the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Bastion, notably, reported the largest percentage increase in its OC headcount, up 62.5% to 13 in April, compared to the year-ago period. The newcomer to the list is now ranked No. 7 in Orange County.

Meanwhile, **The Brand Amp** of Costa Mesa added the most people over the past year with 18 new additions, up 43.9% to 59.

OC's largest agency furloughed some staff at the start of the pandemic, but found existing client work and new accounts emerge in July. A Paycheck Protection Program loan helped bring back furloughed staff and hire new ones with the company positioned "for a significant bounce back year in 2021," noted **The Brand Amp** co-founder **Todd Brooks**. ■



THE LIST PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

RANKED BY NUMBER OF OC EMPLOYEES

Rank	Company	Company logo	OC employees	Companywide employees	Primary markets served	Partial list of clients	Top local official(s)
Prev. Rank	•Address •Headquarters		•yearly % change	•yearly % change			•Title •Phone/fax
1	The Brand Amp 1945 Placentia Ave., Bldg. C Costa Mesa 92627-6274 Costa Mesa Website: thebrandamp.com Email: karen@thebrandamp.com		59 44%	70 32%	automotive, consumer, healthcare, nonprofit, other, retail, technology	Arlo, Incipio, Surfrider Foundation, Fluidmaster, Cure Duchenne, Indian Motorcycles, Traeger Grills, Mitsubishi Motors, Skullcandy, Carl's Jr., Wilson Sporting Goods	Todd Brooks/Marc Altieri/Charley Fitzwilliam co-founders (949) 438-1060
2	Global Results Communications (GRC) 201 Sandpointe Ave., Ste. 440 Santa Ana 92707-5742 Santa Ana Website: globalresultspr.com Email: grc@globalresultspr.com		33 10%	90 13%	consumer, government, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, nonprofit, technology, telecom	Verizon, Wahoo's Fish Taco, Ericsson, EPAM, Telit, Geotab	Valerie Christopherson founder/CEO (949) 608-0276/(949) 271-4680
3	Idea Hall 611 Anton Blvd., Ste. 140 Costa Mesa 92626-7005 Costa Mesa Website: ideahall.com Email: rebecca@ideahall.com		27 42%	27 42%	consumer, government, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, nonprofit, other, real estate, retail	Be Well OC, Orange County Healthcare Agency, MemorialCare, Nuveen, Cityview, Sabal Financial, C.W. Driver Companies, CapRock Partners, H. Hendy & Associates, Cystinosis Research Foundation	Rebecca Hall CEO/president (714) 436-0855/(714) 263-8743
4	IMW Agency 3190 Airport Loop Drive, Bldg. K-1 Costa Mesa 92626-3403 Costa Mesa Website: imwagency.com Email: chris@imwagency.com		16 23%	16 23%	automotive, consumer, government, Hispanic, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, retail, technology	Santa Barbara Vintners Association, Sizzler, Ayres Hotels, Hyundai Glovis, Avocados from Mexico, The Flower Fields, Kayanoya Foods, LA Flower Market	Chris Bretschger president (714) 557-7100
5	Brower Group ⁽¹⁾ 220 Newport Center Drive, Ste. 22 Newport Beach 92660-7550 Newport Beach Website: brower-group.com Email: jqader@brower-group.com		14 0%	16 0%	real estate, retail	KBS, Lewis Retail Centers, Passco Companies, Avanath Capital Management, DAUM Commercial, NADEL Architecture & Planning, RAAM Construction, Tauro Capital, Western National Group	Jenn Quader president (949) 438-6262
5	Reveille Inc. 1931 Newport Blvd. Costa Mesa 92627-2250 Costa Mesa Website: reveilleinc.com Email: ideas@reveilleinc.com		14 17%	15 25%	consumer, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, other, real estate, retail	City of Hope Orange County, Sole Technology, FivePoint Holdings Inc., Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, YMCA of Orange County, Make-A-Wish OC & IE, Community Action Partnership Orange County, Families Forward, Human Options, Waymakers	Brenda Springer CEO/president (949) 692-3239

Abbreviations: NA: not applicable; NR: not ranked
Note: To the best of our knowledge, this information is accurate as of press time. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the list, omissions and typographical errors sometimes occur. Unless otherwise noted, the information on this list was provided by the companies themselves. Though we have asked the companies to report only permanent employees, some numbers may still include contractors. List may not be reprinted without permission of the editor. Photos show the first top official

listed.
⁽¹⁾ The firm plans to rebrand as The Smart Agency later this year

Researched by Meghan Kliever

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Rank	•Headquarters						•Phone/fax	
7 (NR)	Bastion Elevate 4041 MacArthur Blvd., Ste. 400 Newport Beach 92660-2554 Melbourne, Australia Website: bastionelevate.com Email: shana@bastionelevate.com		13 63%	15 88%	automotive, consumer, government, healthcare, Hispanic, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, real estate, retail, technology	Unispace, Hammer & Nails Men's Grooming, Hypeach, Vitae London, Cyrex Laboratories, Iron Rebel, WowWow, Lucky 7 Spirits, Ontario Auto Center, Telematics, Lemonade, Cousins Maine Lobster, K1Speed, Guess, Total Warehouse, iRestore, UFC, Avalara, International Fruit Genetics, DemandStar, SoberBuddy, Sandland Sleep	Shana Starr CEO (949) 433-0851	
7 (12)	Communications LAB 701 E. Chapman Ave. Orange 92866-1620 Orange Website: communicationslab.com Email: info@communicationslab.com		13 8%	13 8%	government, healthcare, Hispanic, hospitality/tourism, nonprofit, other, real estate, retail	Southern California Edison, City of Anaheim, East Orange County Water District, South Orange County Economic Coalition, OC Tax, OC Forum, Orange Unified School District, CIGNA Healthcare, Orange County Council of Governments (OCCOG), LA Metro, City of Santa Ana, MOMS OC, County of Orange, OC Sanitation District	Arianna Barrios CEO (949) 215-5539/(949) 215-5549	
7 (4)	Core Strategic Group 2099 S. State College Blvd., Ste. 630 Anaheim 92806-6142 Sacramento Website: corestrategicgroup.com Email: cspriggs@fsbpublicaffairs.com		13 8%	46 31%	automotive, consumer, government, healthcare, Hispanic, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, other, real estate, technology	Anaheim Chamber of Commerce, Ford Motor Co., Western Carwash Association, Habitat for Humanity, San Diego SHRM, Anaheim/Orange County Lodging Association, Southern California Edison	Jeff Flint CEO/president (949) 336-4500/(949) 448-5933	
7 (7)	Hill+Knowlton Strategies 3200 Bristol St., Ste. 300 Costa Mesa 92626-1838 New York Website: hkstrategies.com Email: larry.krutchik@hkstrategies.com		13 ⁽²⁾ NA	2,000 ⁽²⁾ NA	automotive, consumer, government, healthcare, Hispanic, hospitality/tourism, nonprofit, other, real estate, technology	would not disclose	Larry Krutchik executive VP, California (714) 913-9700	
7 (NR)	Rocket Launch Marketing & PR⁽³⁾ 190 S. Glassell St., Ste. 201 Orange 92866-1477 Orange Website: rocketlaunchagency.com Email: blastoff@rocketlaunchagency.com		13 0%	13 0%	automotive, consumer, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, other, technology	Dole Food Company, Beko U.S., Orange County Community Foundation, Boys & Girls Clubs in Los Angeles/Orange County, California Southern University, Hydra Design Labs	Dan Nasitka principal/VP (714) 694-7190/(714) 694-7194	
12 (NR)	Trinet Internet Solutions Inc. 108 Discovery, Ste. 100 Irvine 92618-3131 Irvine Website: trinetsolutions.com Email: info@trinetsolutions.com		12 0%	13 8%	consumer, government, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, retail	OCTA, Catalina Express, Variety the Childrens' Charity, Maruchan, Juice It Up!, Gelson's Supermarkets, World Vision	John Carley/Ron Weber CEO/COO (949) 442-8900/(949) 442-8905	
12 (5)	Young Company 361 Forest Ave., Ste. 105 Laguna Beach 92651-2138 Laguna Beach Website: youngcompany.com Email: byoung@youngcompany.com		12 NA	12 NA	automotive, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, manufacturing, nonprofit, technology	Advantage Software, Irvine Subaru, ITC Diligence, JMG Security Systems, MWS Wire, Weber Plywood, Wissle Alert	Bart Young CEO/creative director (949) 284-7370/(949) 376-9205	
14 (12)	Ajenda Public Relations 940 W. Chapman Ave., Ste. 202 Orange 92868-2893 Orange Website: ajendapr.com Email: jen@ajendapr.com		10 0%	10 0%	hospitality/tourism	Farmer Boys, La Casa del Camino Hotel, Trade Food Hall, Mess Hall, The Rooftop Lounge, Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen, Brunos Italian Kitchen, Old Vine Kitchen + Bar, Newport Beach Wine & Food Festival, The Blind Pig Kitchen + Bar	Jennifer Morris founder (949) 874-7374	
14 (NR)	Curt Pringle & Associates 1801 E. Katella Ave., Ste. 1002 Anaheim 92805-6600 Anaheim Website: curtpringle.com Email: email@curtpringle.com		10 11%	10 11%	government, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, other, real estate, retail, technology	Brookfield Homes, CHOC Children's, Jamboree Housing, Shea Properties, Verizon	Curt Pringle president (714) 939-9070/(714) 939-9080	
14 (NR)	Gold PR Social Media 9970 Irvine Center Drive, Ste. 100 Irvine 92618-4357 Irvine Website: goldpr.com Email: info@goldpr.com		10 25%	10 25%	automotive, consumer, healthcare, retail, technology	Comfort Keepers, Cooper Surgical, University Medical, Mission Pets, MitoQ, Staar Surgical	Shari Gold/Robert Villanueva CEO/CFO (714) 251-0375/(951) 257-0321	
14 (11)	Madison Alexander PR 250 El Camino Real, Ste. 116 Tustin 92780-3655 Tustin Website: madisonalexanderpr.com Email: dchm@madisonalexanderpr.com		10 -9%	10 -9%	technology	The Santa Fe Group, Shared Assessments, Corent Technology Inc., Enevate, Flash Memory Summit, Lucy Security, Centripetal Networks, MinervaLabs, Gurukul, Rain Capital, Inkscreen, GRIMM, SCTHYE, Fudo Security, YouAttest, Approov, observiQLabs, Aleada, Veridium, XSOC, CSweet	Dan Chmielewski principal (714) 832-8716/(714) 832-8916	
14 (12)	The ACE Agency 3420 Bristol St., Ste. 430 Costa Mesa 92626-1996 Costa Mesa Website: theaceagency.com Email: info@theaceagency.com		10 0%	10 0%	government, hospitality/tourism, nonprofit, other, real estate, retail	OC Parks, Irvine Ranch Conservancy, Newport Dunes Waterfront Resort & Marina, Dana Point Harbor, 2nd & PCH, Pacific Surfliner, Sailhouse, Miguel's Jr., Farmhouse at Roger's Gardens, A Restaurant, CdM Restaurant	Ashley Patterson founder/president	
14 (12)	The Ignite Agency 2601 Main St., Ste. 100 Irvine 92614-6296 Irvine Website: ignitecp.com Email: mthimmig@conservaco.com		10 0%	12 0%	automotive, consumer, healthcare, other, retail, technology	We Predict, Speed Track, Duke Robotics, Amnion Life, Realty E Vest, French Quarter Holdings, Aziome, SQRDUP, IRobot, Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties, TomBot, Esportz Entertainment Corp., Esportz Network, Mindstream Studio, Ventex nc.	Mark F. Thimmig chairman/CEO/president (949) 377-2970	
14 (12)	Venture Strategic 1 Corporate Park, Ste. 101 Irvine 92606-5150 Irvine Website: venturestrategic.com Email: jeff@venturestrategic.com		10 0%	10 0%	consumer, government, healthcare, nonprofit, other, retail, telecom	KPC Group, Core-Mark International, Verizon, IQ Risk, Clay Lacy Aviation, Associated Builders and Contractors of Southern California, San Bernardino County Transportation Authority, American Clean Power, Ankona Capital, K2 Gold, OC Business Council, Pierce Aesthetics	Jeff Corless CEO/president (714) 676-8332	

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⁽²⁾ Business Journal estimate
⁽³⁾ Previously listed as Rocket Science Marketing and Public Relations

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 Highlight provided for fee