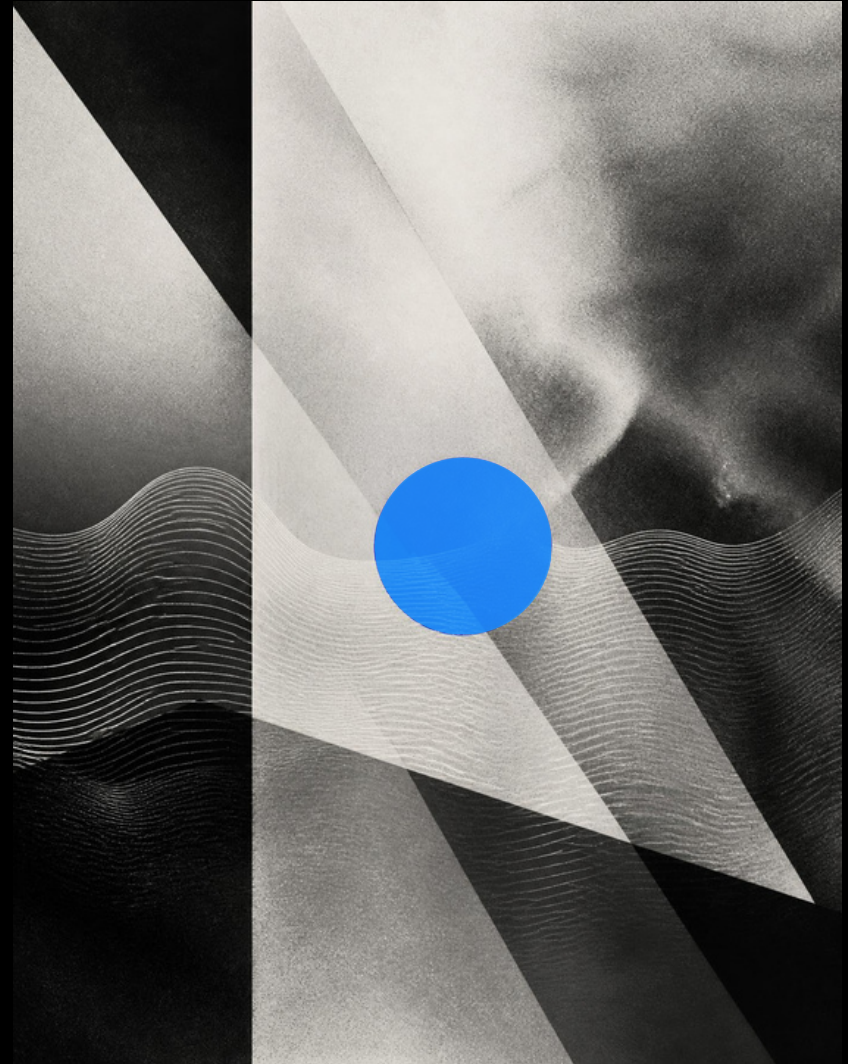




BUYING MODERN PR

*A Procurement Guide for Building More Productive
Agency Partnerships in an AI-Driven World*



INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, procurement and communications teams want the same thing: the best possible outcome for the organizations they both serve. Procurement's mandate is to be a good steward of company resources. Communications leaders build trust, protect reputation, and navigate an information environment that gets more complicated by the day. From that perspective, the two functions have a lot more in common than what one would think.



This guide is intended to help procurement teams fully understand what modern PR agencies do, where they create value, and how commercial agreements can be structured so both sides win.

THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY

Ten years ago, people mostly found information through search engines, traditional media, and company websites. Today, they move fluidly between AI assistants, search engines, news outlets, social platforms, creators, podcasts, Reddit threads, newsletters, analyst reports, reviews, and conversations with people they trust. Increasingly, AI systems pull and consolidate into a single answer.

That is a huge shift for organizations. Companies are not just competing for media coverage or search rankings anymore; they are competing to become trusted sources within a much more complex communications ecosystem.

Visibility used to be enough, but not anymore; now credibility, consistency, and consensus all matter just as much. The organizations that consistently earn trusted coverage, expert recognition, and authentic engagement are increasingly the ones that show up in AI-generated responses. Reputation and credibility have effectively become part of the information infrastructure.

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WHAT MODERN PR ACTUALLY DELIVERS

Many still see PR as only media or press relations. That is still an important part, but it is no longer even remotely the entirety of the discipline. Modern PR organizations manage three strategic components:

REPUTATION.

It shapes customer preference, investor confidence, employee engagement, regulatory relationships, recruiting, and how well an organization holds up under pressure. Unlike advertising, you cannot buy reputation; it must be consistently earned over time.

NARRATIVE.

Markets run on stories: how investors understand a company, how employees understand strategy, how policymakers understand an issue, how customers understand value. PR helps organizations build narratives that are credible, and that explain not just what they do, but why it matters.

MOMENTUM.

Communications no longer stops when an article is published. Good ideas spread into social conversations, creator content, podcast discussions, AI-generated summaries and keep shaping how stakeholders think long after the original placement. The real value of modern PR is not in any single deliverable. It is in the momentum that builds and compounds over time.

WHY BUYING PR IS CATEGORICALLY DIFFERENT

Procurement teams are experts at developing and formalizing a framework for commercial discipline, and many purchasing categories benefit from their unique ability to analyze and compare suppliers, specifications and pricing.

Communications do not conform to that mold. Organizations rarely hire a PR agency because it writes press releases differently than another one.

They hire an agency for its judgment, experience, relationships, creativity, industry knowledge, strategic thinking, and its ability to provide solutions and help executives make better calls when it matters most. As AI makes content cheaper and easier to produce, it raises the value of everything AI cannot easily replicate, such as credibility, context, creativity and counsel you can trust.

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MEASURING VALUE

One of the longest-running myths about PR is that it cannot be measured. Modern communications measurement has come a long way, and leading organizations now define success by delivering business outcomes, including:

- Reputation lift
- Cost avoidance
- Market share
- Narrative consistency across channels
- Political and social influence
- Commercial impact
- Speed to deal / resolution
- Customer retention (Net Promoter Score)
- Workforce and practice growth
- Employee favorability and recruitment

Not every PR program can or should be measured the same way. A product launch and a public affairs initiative need different yardsticks, and an employee engagement campaign is not judged like an executive thought leadership program. The partnerships that work best agree and align on what success looks like at the start of each engagement or initiative.

WHAT GREAT PROCUREMENT/AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE

Strong and productive relationships always start with transparency: clients are upfront about business priorities, and agencies are honest about what they can and cannot do. They define success and value together, agreeing early on how progress will be measured, so both parties are aligned and “in the loop.” They treat expertise as an important differentiator, keeping commercial conversations focused on outcomes rather than just squeezing inputs. They leave room for innovation, because when agencies can invest in talent, technology, and the most effective AI tools, clients feel the benefit directly in better advice and the resulting execution. And furthermore, they communicate regularly, as new opportunities surface, priorities shift, and when engagements warrant formal evaluation and feedback.

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PROCURING MODERN PR

1 BUY OUTCOMES, NOT ACTIVITY.

Center commercial conversations on the business results the communications plan is intended to deliver.

2 REMEMBER, EXPERTISE IS THE PRODUCT.

Creativity, relevant experience, and strategic judgment almost always lead to effective business results.

3 SEPARATE PRICE FROM PAYMENT.

These are separate issues; pricing relates to value received, whereas commercial terms (e.g., payment timing, etc.) deal with financing. These areas need to be negotiated separately.

4 CONTINUOUSLY SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS.

Great relationships allow agencies to keep investing in people and capabilities that most benefit and impact the client.

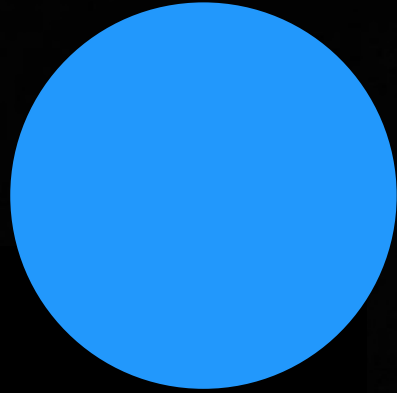
5 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, NOT TRANSACTIONS.

The best outcomes come from enabling trust and ensuring transparency – not just achieving the lowest possible price.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU AND ORGANIZATIONS WE MUTUALLY SUPPORT

There is no doubt that AI is transforming communications, yet its biggest impact may be making authority, credibility and consistency more valuable than ever before. When information is everywhere, people look for sources they can trust. When algorithms summarize the world for our common stakeholder audiences, a reputation needs to be strong enough to shape AI discoverability. And when change moves faster than ever, you need advisors who can turn signals into sound decisions, not just more content or savings.

When both sides understand how modern communications create value, and build commercial relationships around that understanding, they end up with something more durable than just a good deal. They build partnerships that can help all parties earn respect, navigate uncertainty, and develop the kind of reputational capital that influences both the humans you are trying to reach, and the AI systems increasingly between you and them.



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