

THE LIST

PR Firms Start to Climb Out of Pandemic's Hole

LIST: With economic opening, marketers prepare for clients eager to share their messages.

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

Public relations firms have followed diverse paths through the pandemic, with a lot depending on the fortunes of their clients' industries, Valley firms said. Now a new challenge looms as more of the economy opens up with less restrictive state-imposed tiers.

Mustang Marketing's **Dianne McKay** expects the market to be saturated with new marketing campaigns in the coming months. She warns businesses they'll need to manage their expectations this year.



Dianne McKay

“It's going to be a fun year for PR, but it's also going to be a competitive year in PR. ... There is a lot of wanted exposure and probably more than is realistic. It's going to be about managing expectations. Everyone's getting back out there, they have exciting things they've been working on,” McKay said.

Mustang Marketing, No. 18 on the Business Journal's list of PR firms, is based in Thousand Oaks.

Scott Public Relations in Canoga Park, No. 12 on the Business Journal's list, has seen an uptick in business the past year because of its robust health care clientele.

“Our company focuses on a couple of different industries like health care, insurance and technologies related to those industries,” said **Joy Scott**, chief executive. “Clearly, they were very needed, the health care services. There was maybe a shift of focus but the need was definitely still there.”

As for attracting new clients, she sees a mix of established and new companies from the same industries. “The picture actually looks pretty good,” Scott added.

She said there were a “few ups and downs” when it came to her consumer-facing clients, but those that were innovating, particularly in telehealth and digital devices, were able to increase marketing.

“We are fortunate to be in that business-to-business space, a sector that's growing. Business-to-consumer is much more difficult because so many businesses have not been able to operate or had to cut way back on what they were able to do, cut back their budgets. In that regard, it's more difficult for agencies that are consumer-focused,” she said.

Scott PR's clients include **Kaiser Perma-**

nente, Providence Health & Services, and Blue Shield of California.

Client communication

A PR industry report by **IBISWorld** in October said revenue for U.S. firms was expected to drop a total of 12.3 percent for last year.

Mustang Marketing saw steep dips in business, but finally sees a balanced checkbook in the last month or so.

“Business had dropped in some months as far as 40 percent off (the previous) year in the worst months, and we've obviously cut a lot of expenses,” explained McKay. “Now we're back, we're breaking even. Probably in the next couple months we'll start making money again. I'm feeling really optimistic.”

Mustang's clients include **Mission Lin-en Supply** based in Santa Barbara, **Ventura County Credit Union** and **Workrite Uniform Co.** in Oxnard.

McKay said the firm had received PPP loans to keep her employees, and in turn was able to do some pro bono work for clients that would have otherwise cut back on marketing.

“Some I did at a deep discount and some I did completely free, but I didn't want them to get out of the habit of having marketing, and I had gotten this loan from the SBA that was paying my employees. I said, ‘They need to work, and you need the marketing, so let's just keep going.’ That built a lot of customer loyalty and understanding, and it just seemed like the right thing to do,” she added.

That illustrates a trend McKay and Scott

have seen across the industry — maintaining relationships and communication coming out of the heavier months of the pandemic.

‘It's more difficult for agencies that are consumer-focused.’

JOY SCOTT,
Scott Public Relations

“The first couple months could have been a bloodbath for us. We did the entire Census campaign for the (Ventura) county twice, once when they didn't think the stay-at-home order was going to last that long, so then we had to go back and redo it when we realized malls were not going to reopen. All the media we planned for that we had to do something else with,” said McKay. “It was really great that we had those relationships in place for that.”

Another trend is accelerated diversification of the field, Scott said. A PR agency is expected to offer a client more in-house services such as content creation, social media and search engine optimization. Most businesses think firms mainly handle media relations, Scott added.

“I think there's a growing understanding that these really should not be siloed but should be integrated into one program,” explained Scott. “It's really necessary, and they all work together.”

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65*	149.00*	113.00*	127.00*	39.00
66	174.00	138.00	152.00	42.00
67	189.00	154.00	168.00	45.00
68	189.00	154.00	168.00	47.00
69	210.00	177.62	193.00	50.00
70	210.00	179.00	193.00	52.00
71	229.00	192.08	216.00	54.00
72	229.00	199.69	216.00	57.00
73	248.00	207.63	232.00	60.00
74	248.00	215.84	232.00	63.00
75	264.00	224.33	248.00	66.00
76	264.00	233.16	248.00	68.00
77	282.00	242.31	265.00	69.00
78	282.00	251.81	265.00	70.00
79	297.00	261.63	278.00	74.00
80	297.00	271.83	278.00	79.00
81	320.00	282.71	292.00	79.00
82	320.00	282.71	292.00	79.00
83	320.00	282.71	307.00	79.00
84	320.00	282.71	307.00	79.00
85	358.00	282.71	321.00	79.00
86+	358.00	282.71	varies	79.00

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