



the starr conspiracy

2019

B2B

PR

RESEARCH REPORT

HOW GROWING COMPANIES INVEST

THE LESSON:

THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN A PR APEX FOR US

For years over at The Starr Conspiracy HQ, one question hung with us about public relations (PR) and analyst relations (AR) strategy:

Are people paying for outputs, or outcomes?

Our belief for a long time was that people seek simpler outputs from their PR and AR relationships, i.e., press releases, national media placements, and speaker slot submissions. This had been a normative approach to the PR/AR world for years. We would constantly hear on the market that an enterprise software and services company would be saying: “We need a team that gets us! We need to get our approach into WSJ or HBR!”

A funny thing happened along this journey, though. **We actually got ourselves a nice write-up in *The Wall Street Journal* just after Thanksgiving 2017 about how collaborative and beautiful and tear-inducing our culture is.** By all the PR logic we had accumulated, the dam should have absolutely burst. We had three or four open positions at the time, and we should have been flooded with applicants. The phone should have been on almost-literal fire with new clients.

None of that happened. It just didn't. We framed the article, we got a lot of love on LinkedIn, and a few longtime partners called us. It wasn't a huge biz dev driver, and **it didn't get us a torrent of top-tier candidates.** Maybe we needed to reconsider the PR/AR space. So, we did.

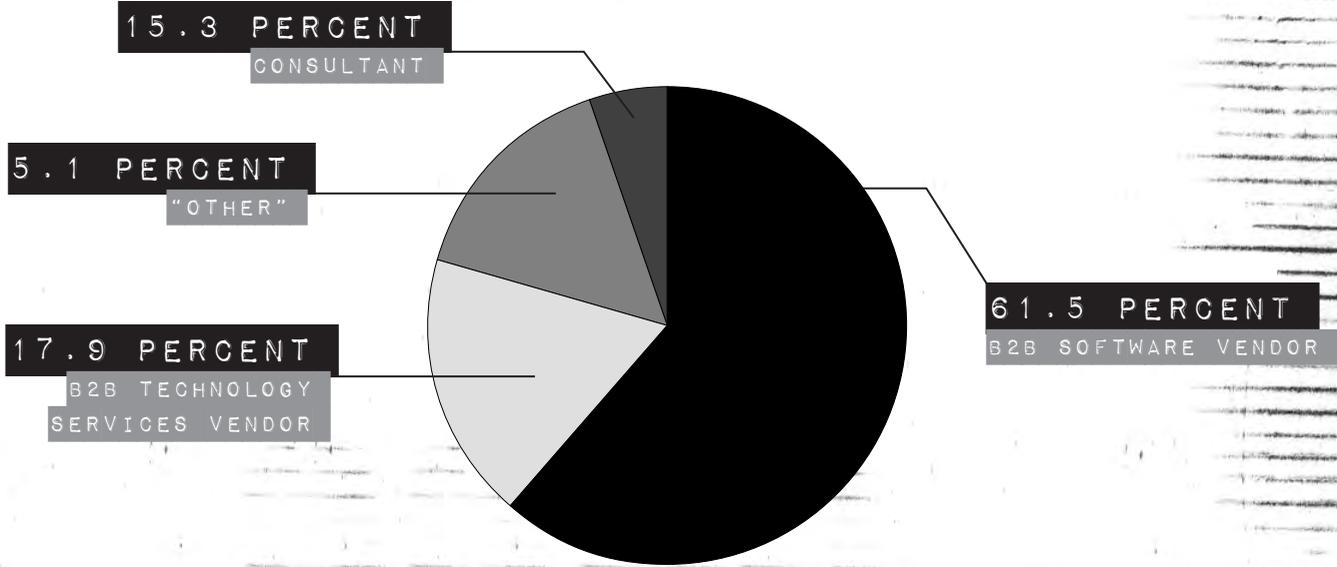
We decided to talk to the folks in the enterprise software world who source PR/AR services to better understand their attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and purchase intent. The results are laid out below, visually, and with context.

The 35,000-foot view, before we get started? **PR/AR absolutely must be integrated within a broader B2B marketing plan.** Too often, companies pay premiums for national and international placement approaches that, by themselves, are useless. **Our WSJ inclusion didn't work** because it was essentially a one-off; it wasn't part of a sustainable, multi-impression approach. **It can be seen as fool's gold.**

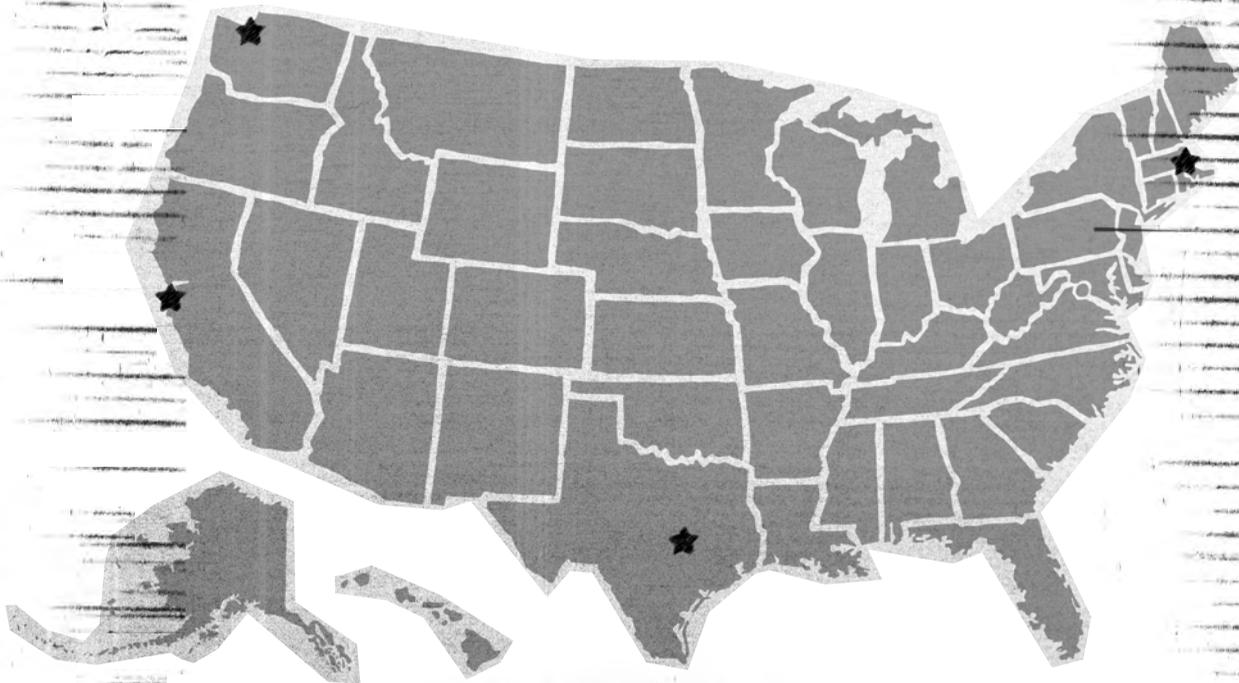


THE NUMBERS: OUR RESPONDENTS

The majority of our respondents work for enterprise software and services companies ...

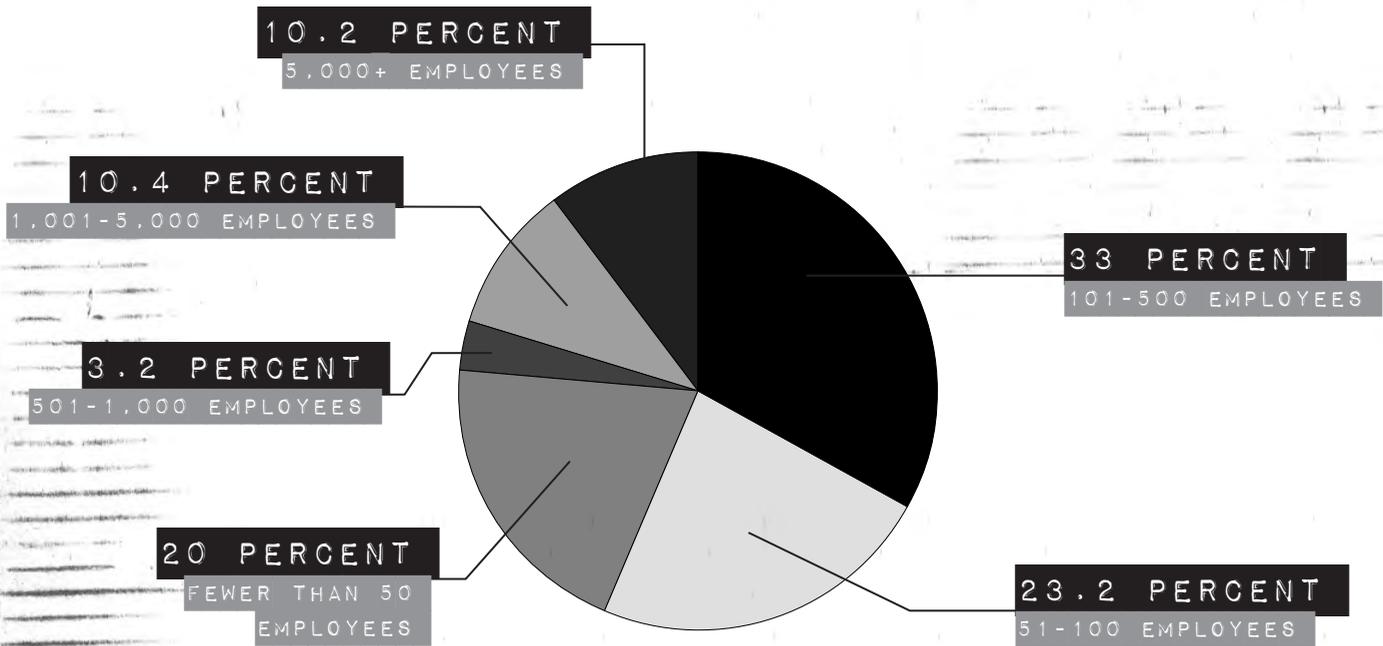


... largely from tech hubs including **San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, and Austin.**

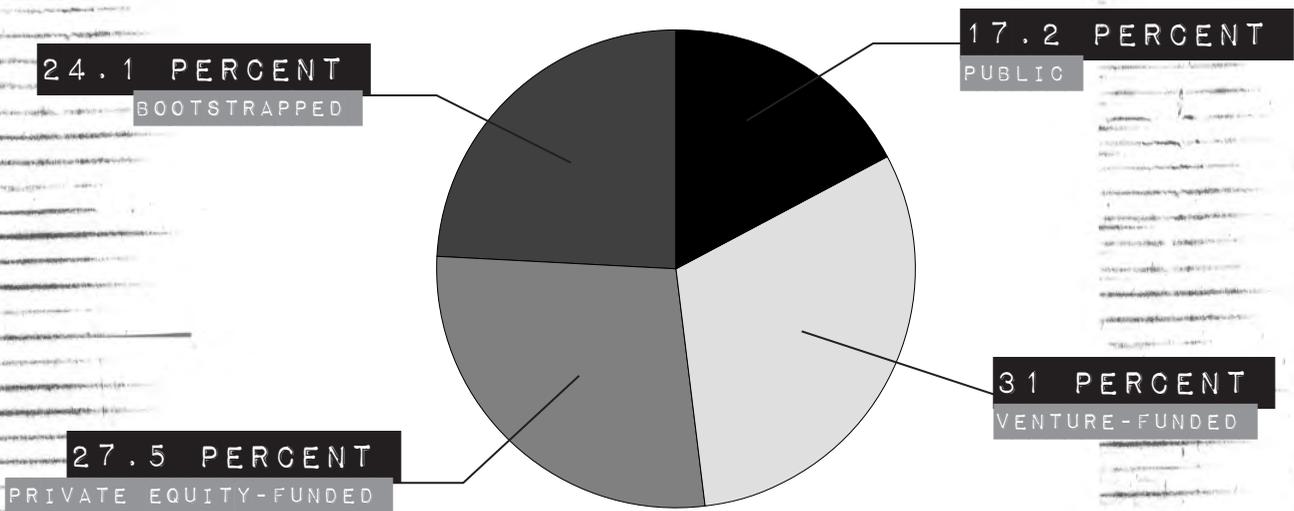




The majority of respondents work for companies of 50 to 500 employees:



And while the majority of respondents work in venture-funded or private equity-funded companies, there was also a good mix of public companies and bootstrapped, or revenue-driven, organizations:



A majority of respondents come from companies that have raised between \$25 million and \$100 million in venture funding, with most advancing to a C-round at this point.



Overwhelmingly, our respondents came from the marketing department and often held a VP role:



65.5%
OF RESPONDENTS
IN MARKETING
DEPARTMENT

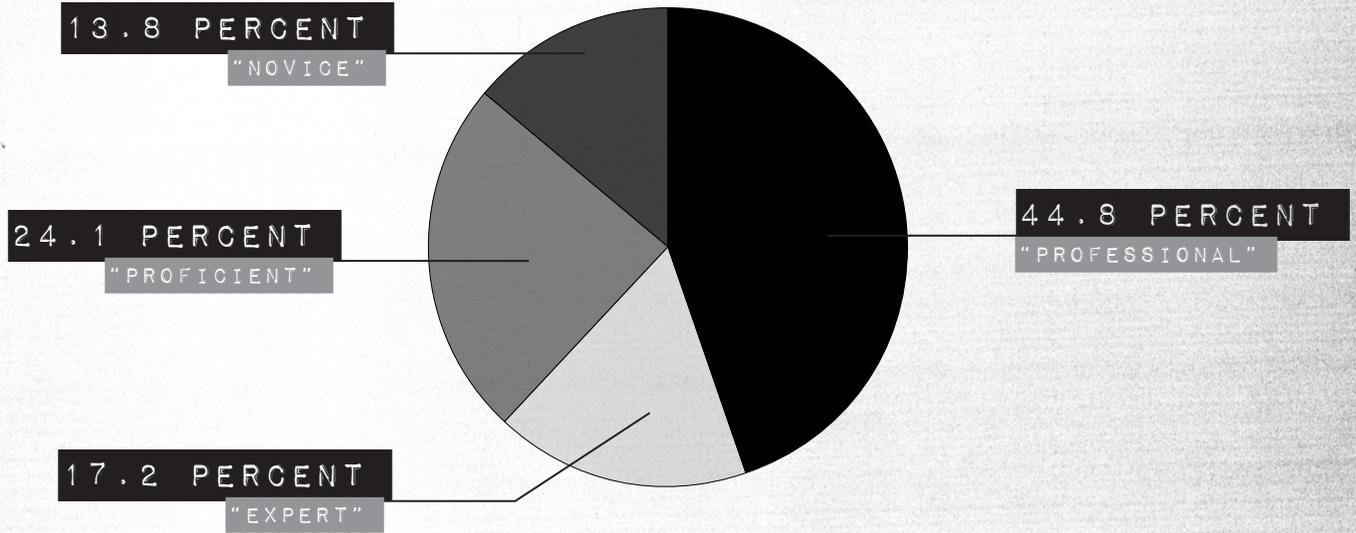


34.5%

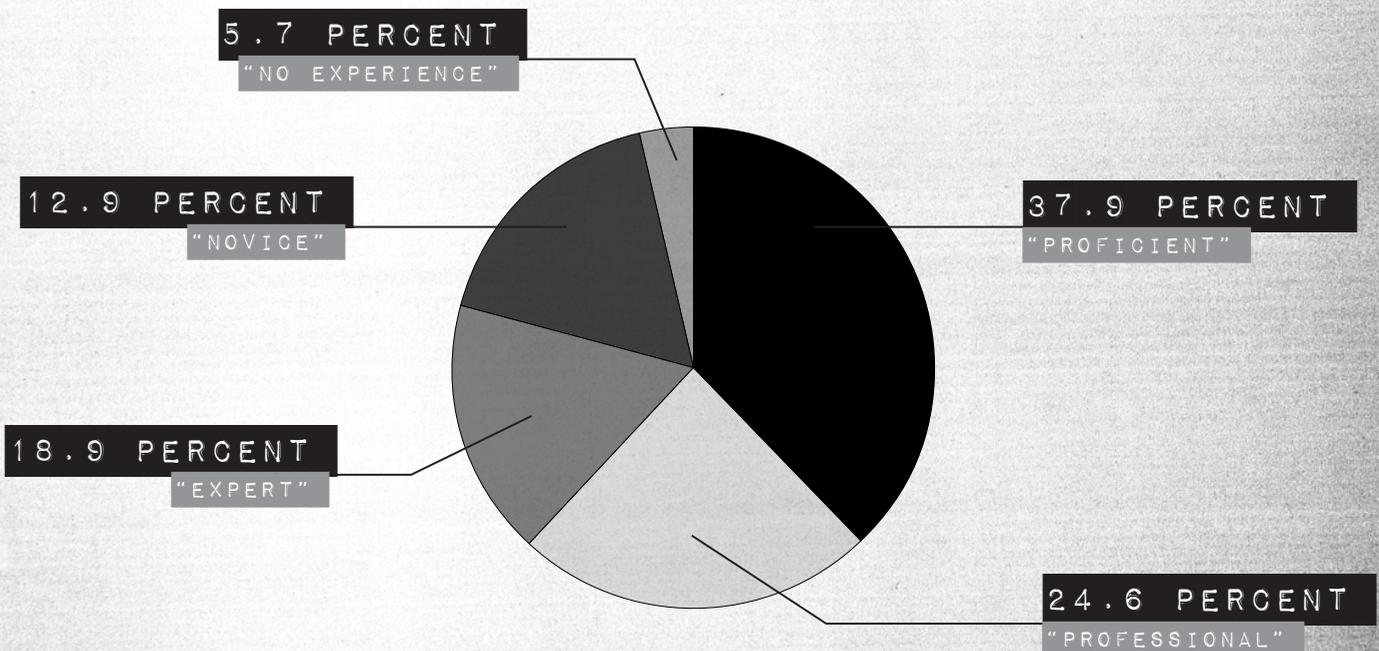
VP TITLE
(11.5 PERCENT DIRECTOR,
MANAGER, AND CEO EACH)



That departmental breakdown is interesting, because despite more respondents coming from marketing – as opposed to strictly PR – backgrounds, there was a high sense of achievement around managing PR, **with most surveyed noting themselves as “expert” or “professional”**:



Similar comfort seemed to exist with managing analyst relations, albeit a bit reduced. Most respondents had themselves as **“proficient” or “professional”** here:



The respondents were overwhelmingly decision-makers, by a factor of over **2 to 1**. Almost every respondent indicated a moderate or high level of influence in purchasing PR/AR services.



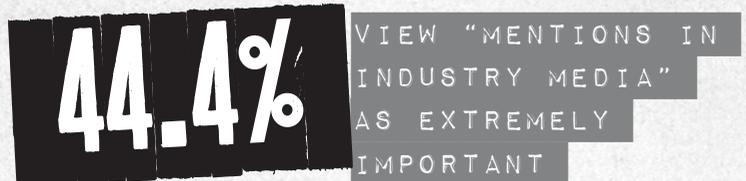
OK. SO WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO MARKETING LEADERS?

Overwhelmingly, **industry placement and expertise** meant more to the respondents than anything else, including national placements, international placements, and digital presence:



This makes perfect sense, and we've seen it for years at HR Tech and other big events in HCM and SaaS. If you win a startup award, buyers start to truly kick tires on what you can offer. You get those calls and interest. Getting your SVP of Analytics a byline in Forbes won't accomplish it. It's nice to tweet out, sure, but it ultimately signifies very little. **The real value lies in industry media – being in the spots where the buyers are reading.**

This also lines up with what respondents deemed “extremely important,” with the top two responses being **“case studies”** and **“mentions in industry media.”**



Deemed unimportant? Crisis management, international press mentions, and mentions on social media.

That speaks to another insight from this survey: **Stand-alone PR firms, those Rolodexes of yore that can get you placed with one phone call, are increasingly dying out.** That approach isn't working. There's too much digital noise and too many ways buyers can learn about you. You don't need someone who's just pushing press releases out in 2019. **You need someone who understands how PR and AR fit into the broader ecosystem of your B2B marketing plan** and how press releases, pitching, and leveraging industry influencers are all tools that have to work together.



AHA!

**BUT HOW MUCH ARE PEOPLE
WILLING TO PAY FOR THAT?**

Glad you asked, because we grabbed some intel on that as well.

64%

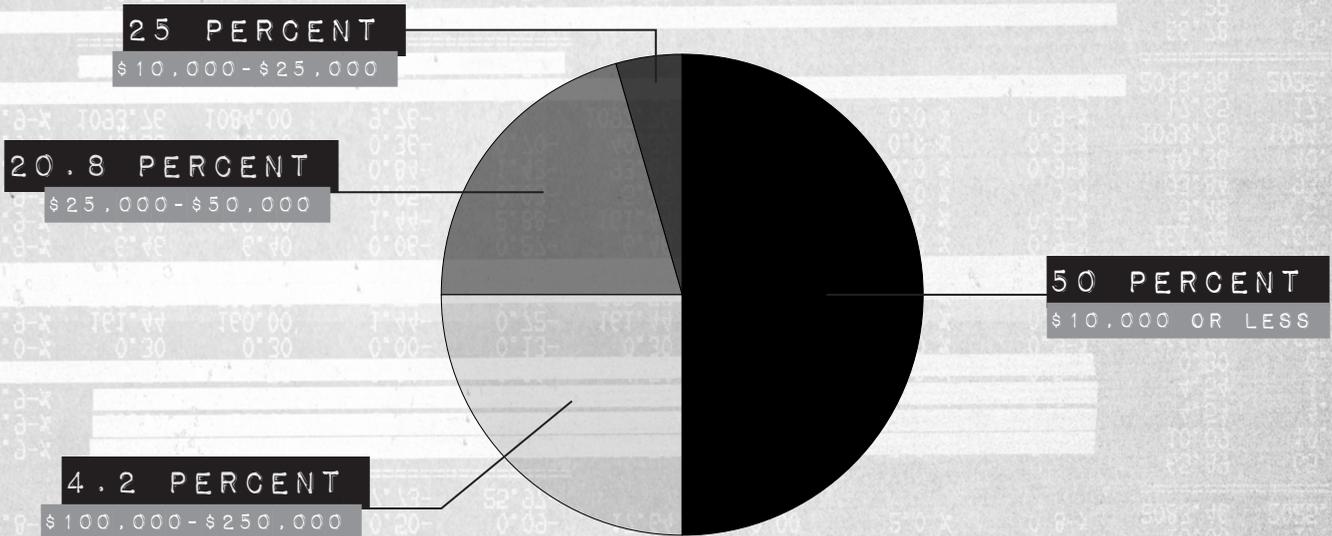
**"LIKELY" OR "EXTREMELY
LIKELY" TO INVEST IN
EXTERNAL PR/AR**



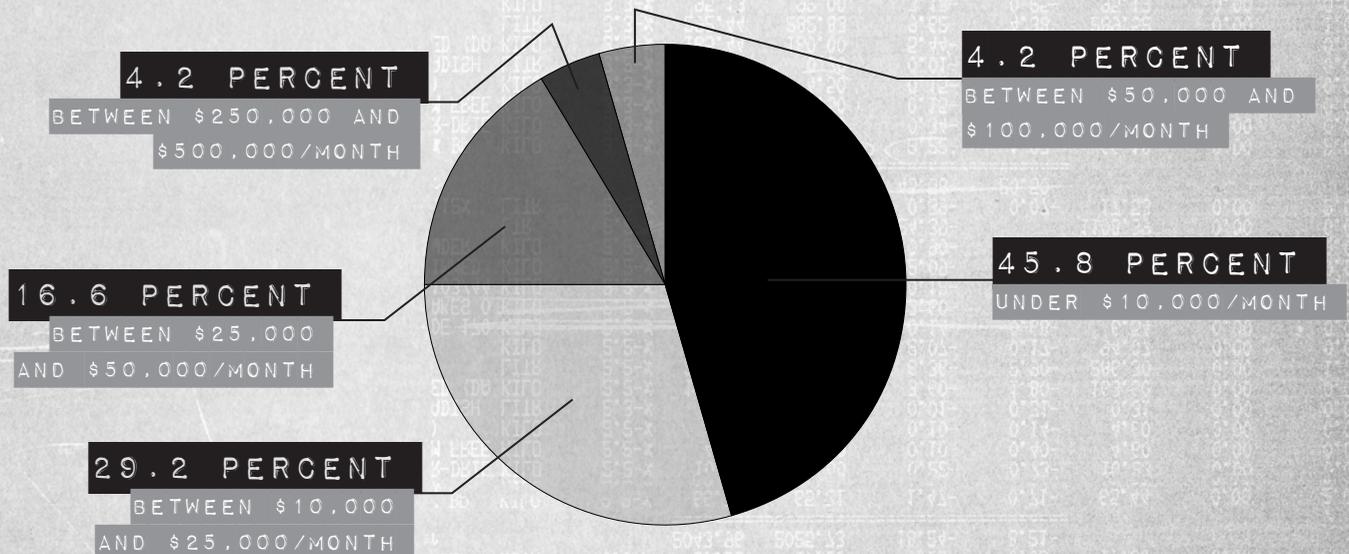
The baseline has been established. **Now let's talk money.**



Per-month spend was largely under **\$25,000**, with most surveyed indicating **under \$10,000 was their preference:**



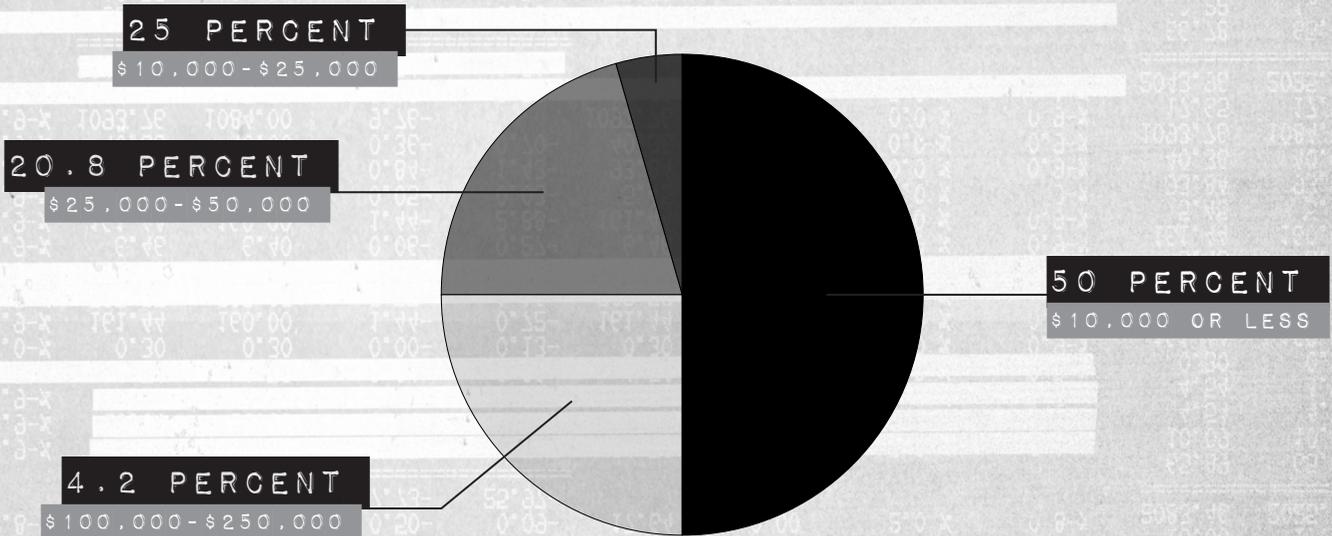
This was in sync with beliefs about “the right amount” to spend on PR/AR, which **predominantly fell below \$25,000/month:**



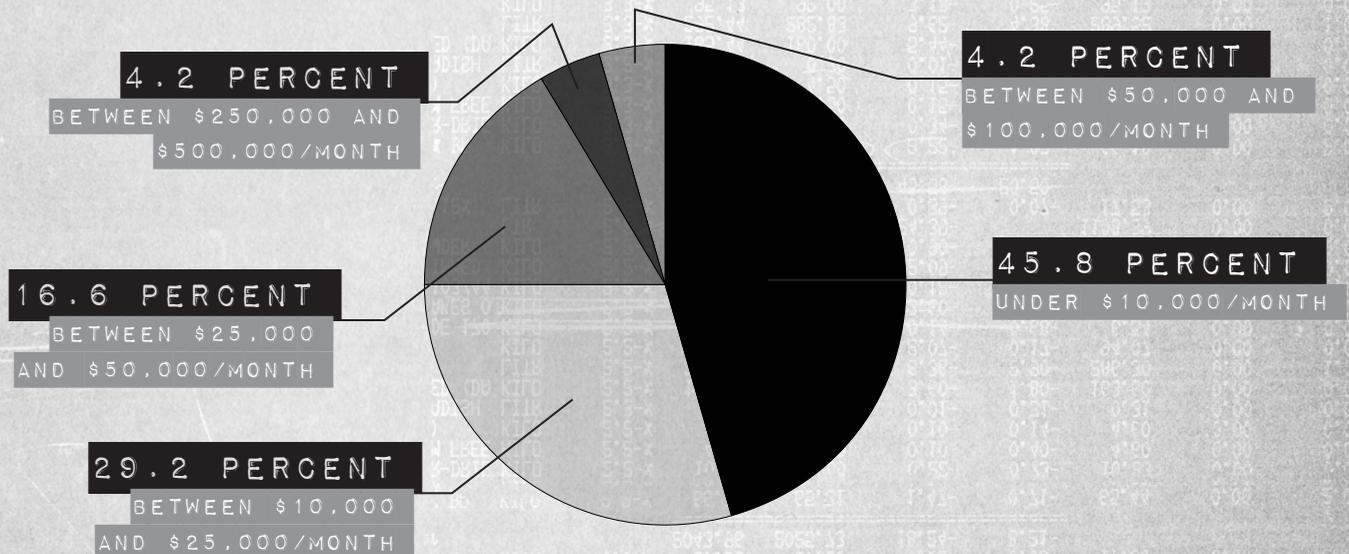
Remember, though: Those numbers are theoretical. About half of those surveyed had hired externally for PR/AR work in the past 12 months. Those respondents who revealed their price point were largely within the **\$10,000 to \$25,000** range referenced above.



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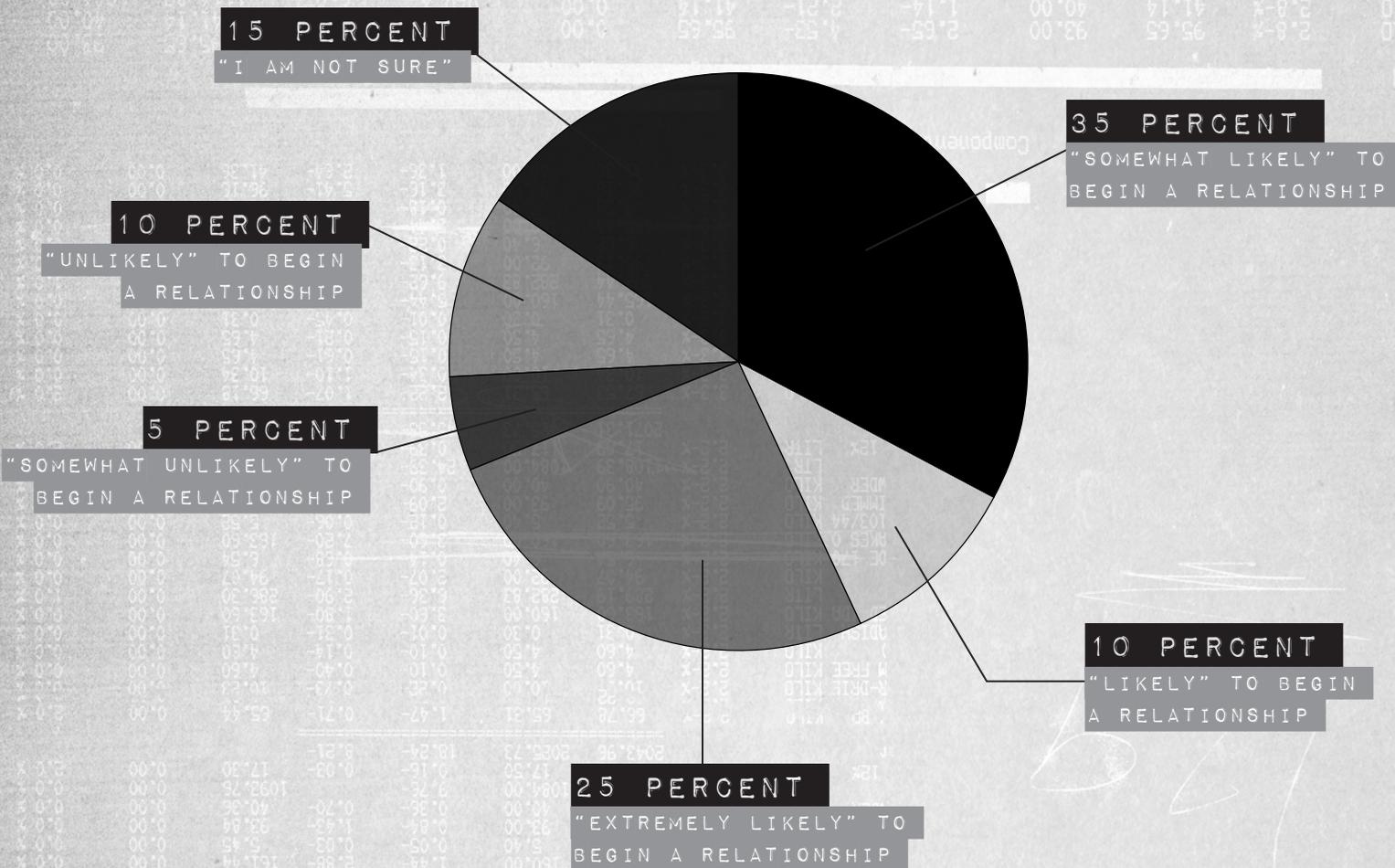
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THE BIG LESSONS OF SOURCING PR/AR

Most respondents were likely to begin an external PR/AR relationship in the next 12 months, ranging from a high of "somewhat likely" to

25 percent indicating they were "extremely likely" to begin such a dynamic:



50%



If you are in that camp of wanting **truly strategic PR/AR**, here's what you initially need to remember:

1. REALIZE WHERE YOUR END BUYER GETS THEIR INFORMATION:

This will largely be industry sources, as opposed to national/international "big name" placements.

2. SEEK LESS VANITY OUTCOMES:

We all want to be able to frame the WSJ profile. Heck, we enjoyed doing it. But remember: It didn't accomplish as much as you'd think. Take it to your personal life on this one: A ton of Instagram likes on one specific photo is a nice serotonin boost. What does it mean a few days later?

3. OFTENTIMES, PR IS LED BY ... WAIT FOR IT ... :

... marketing professionals who think they understand PR. This is folly. It's folly with AR as well. Just because you've mastered some of the tenets of marketing doesn't mean, even remotely, that you understand the worlds of PR and AR. Those are specialized and need to be treated as such.

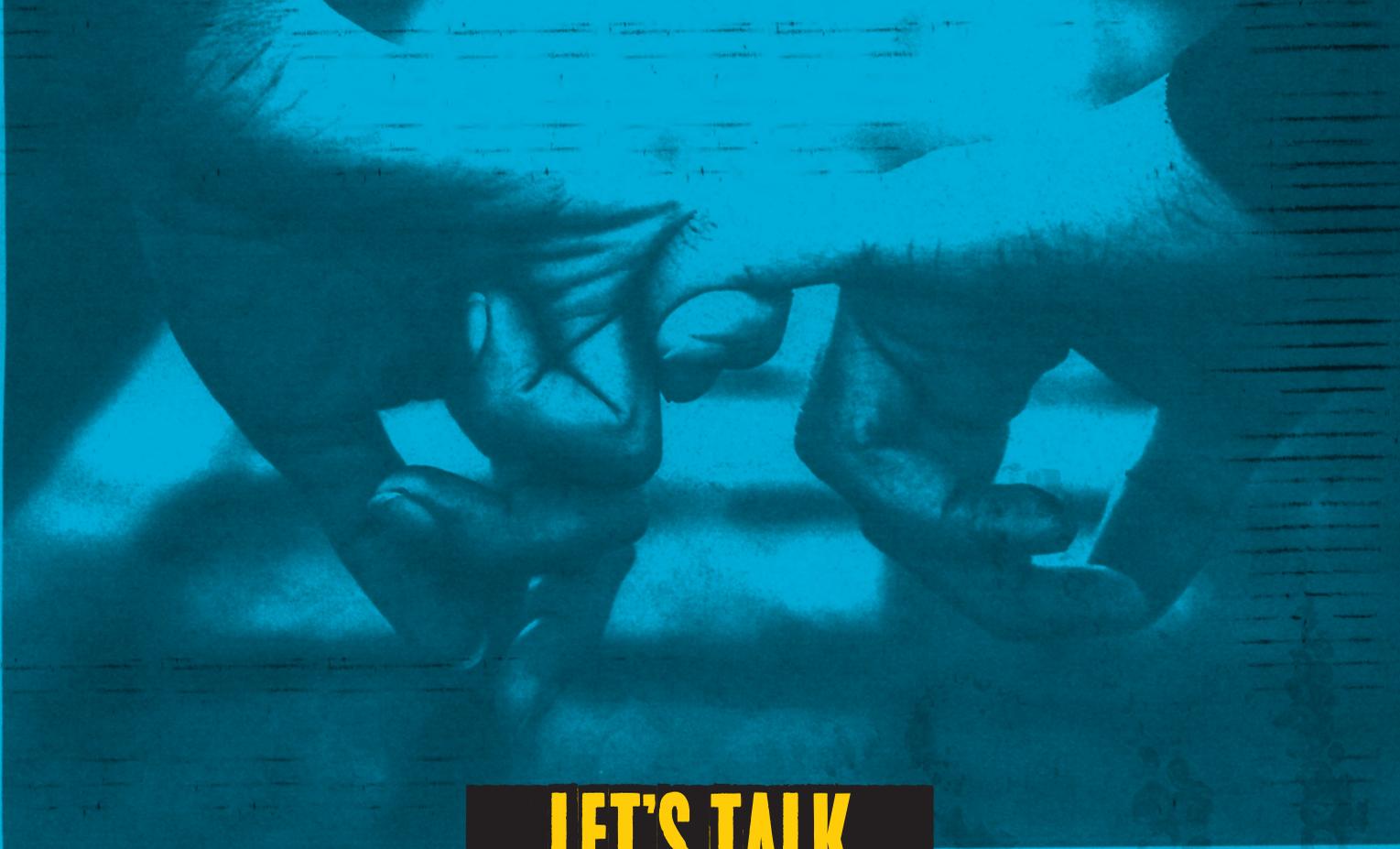
4. DON'T BREAK THE BANK, BUT DON'T CHEAP OUT EITHER:

Good PR and AR, if integrated within your overall marketing approach, can be a game-changer. It can allow buyers (and job-seekers) to have a fully formed opinion of you and your greatness. To get to that sweet spot requires money, though. You need to pay for it, likely somewhere between \$12,000 and \$25,000/month.



HOW WE CAN HELP

For HR technology and services companies, industry connections are what matter in PR/AR, as shown in this white paper. Well, we were proud that in the section of the survey dedicated to perceptions about us, most respondents agreed we had better relationships with industry experts, analysts, and journalists than other agencies. It's exciting because it's actually very true: **We do have those relationships.** When those are managed right, you're already ahead of the pack on PR/AR. In short: We can help, and if you don't need PR/AR services right this second, we're always game to chat about how the game is evolving.



LET'S TALK

ABOUT THE STARR CONSPIRACY

The Starr Conspiracy is an integrated business-to-business marketing agency that helps HCM industry innovators propel brand awareness, drive leads, and eat market share like nobody's business. We're not your typical agency — we meld digital advertising, brand innovation, and industry insights to change categories, industries, and — yes — even the entire notion of B2B marketing as we know it. Revolutionaries hell-bent on shaking things up are welcome. Conformists, please stay home (you'll hate working with us, anyway).

