



## **New Insights Show the Evolution of Job Demands of Senior Level Communications Professionals**

*Executive Search Firm Heyman Associates Examined over 150 Job Descriptions to Assess Key Changes and Trending Vernacular in the Function*

NEW YORK, NY – September 26, 2024 –

The demands on senior communications professionals have been on the rise over the last decade. Responsibilities, role assumptions, and expectations have evolved to be increasingly more strategic, business, and operationally oriented than ever before.

Heyman Associates, a leading executive search firm focused exclusively on C-Suite and senior talent across the communications, corporate affairs, marketing, and investor relations professions, set out to see if the anecdotal discussions pointing toward these changes could be proved by examining keywords and positioning within job descriptions across a variety of industries over time. The findings revealed that there are several key indicators pointing to changes and evolution in responsibilities and vernacular in the profession, while also highlighting skills that remain of great importance.

Heyman Associates audited a sampling of 160 job descriptions, spanning eight years (2016-2024), focusing on Chief, SVP, and VP-level roles in corporate communications, across industries and geographies to identify macro trends in the profession. While all the job descriptions analyzed were crafted, reviewed, and approved in partnership with clients for specific roles, not all job descriptions followed the same format.

Key takeaways:

### **Remits of senior communicators are becoming more strategic and less tactical:**

- Mentions of ‘Public Relations’ have decreased significantly. Comparing job descriptions from 2016 vs. 2023, there was an 81% decrease in mentions of ‘Public Relations.’
- The use of the term ‘Media Relations’ remained mostly stable over time. When comparing 2016 vs. 2023, 60% of job descriptions included the term for both years.
- The appearance of the term ‘Narrative’ increased from 13% in 2016 to 24% in 2020 and 53% in 2023. To date in 2024, it is mentioned in 64% of job descriptions.
- Mentions of ‘Storytelling’ showed a similar trend though less drastic trend at 21% in 2016 compared to 33% in 2023. This peaked in 2020 and 2021 with respective occurrences of 41% and 42%.

***“The field of communications is continually evolving. Our team noticed that several subtle changes are becoming permanent shifts. Building specific initiatives and executing tactical plans are no longer enough; shaping narratives that reflect or propel business strategy is where proven leaders shine. Our takeaway is that senior communications leaders are gaining a broader responsibility and representation, often helping to determine and shape strategy***



***and initiatives at the corporate level rather than being responsible only for communications during implementation.”***

***- Jessamyn Katz, CEO and Client Partner at Heyman Associates***

**Business and Financial Acumen are rising in importance:**

- ‘Business Acumen’ was increasingly mentioned over time with its appearance in job descriptions per year at 8% in 2016, 18% in 2020, and 20% in 2023. We expect this steady increase will continue. Already for 2024, 36% of job descriptions include the term ‘Business Acumen.’
- While Investor Relations still often sits as its own role, there seems to be an increase in expectations that senior communicators possess working knowledge of financial communications and are equipped to partner with the IR team. Mentions of partnering with ‘Investor Relations’ have steadily increased over time with 17% mentions in 2016, 24% mentions in 2020, and 33% mentions in 2023, a 16% increase over eight years.

***“The skillset required of senior communications professionals has evolved over time. Expectations are higher when it comes to general business acumen. Whether the expertise sought is in the financial, reputational, marketing, operations, strategy, or other realm, fluency for participation in executive leadership conversations is needed both to earn a seat at the table and to ensure your advice is heard.”***

***- Sarah Knakmuhs, Chief Communications Officer at M&T Bank***

**ESG and Policy are showing up more today than in the past:**

- While Environmental Social Governance (ESG) and sustainability communications are increasingly included in the scope of responsibility of communications leaders, our findings revealed peaks and valleys. In 2016, there were no mentions of ESG and sustainability. In 2020, 18% of job descriptions mentioned ESG and sustainability, but that dropped to 6% in 2023, and to date in 2024, it is back on the rise with mentions in 36% of job descriptions.
- Mentions of the terms ‘Political’ and ‘Policy’ in job descriptions have increased from 2016 to 2023, both in terms of responsibilities and previous candidate experience. ‘Political’ and/or ‘Policy’ were mentioned in 26% of job descriptions in 2016 versus 47% of job descriptions in 2023, an over 20% increase.

These mentions may be indicators that ESG and policy knowledge are gradually becoming a necessity for top communications professionals, even when dedicated roles still exist for each. Heyman Associates has also observed that the titles Chief Corporate Affairs Officer and Chief Communications and Public Affairs Officer are being used more frequently to accurately depict evolving remits with 20% of job descriptions so far in 2024 utilizing these titles vs. 0% in 2023.



***“This profession has changed significantly over the past 25 years. Along the way, our roles have evolved, along with the words and phrases we use to describe who we are and what we do. However, regardless of the title associated, I believe communications and public affairs, when done right, involves a special blend of art and science, uniting creativity with statistics. Today’s business leaders have access to more data, information and insights than ever before. When we operate with excellence, we can provide our organizations with strategic, creative, effective and impactful counsel to elevate any brand, pursue every opportunity and tackle any challenge.”***

**- *Cristal Downing, Executive Vice President & Chief Communications and Public Affairs Officer at Merck***

While just scratching the surface, this analysis of job descriptions over the last eight years supports anecdotal industry discussions around the evolution and growth of the expectations of senior communications professionals. Some of the table-stakes skills haven’t changed: for example, ‘Relationship’ was the most mentioned term of the 24 analyzed, and collaboration is still key, with a nearly 50% increase from 2016 to 2023 of job descriptions utilizing the terms ‘Partner’ and/or ‘Partner with.’ The vernacular in the profession is clearly evolving; proven leadership and team development skills, along with business acumen are in demand, and historically more siloed responsibilities like ESG and public policy are becoming interwoven under the broader communications remit.

Job descriptions only tell part of the story but are a helpful indication of where the profession is heading. With an election looming, leadership in higher-ed in question, a cautiously optimistic economic outlook, and significant geo-political and cybersecurity risks, among other considerations, the stakes are higher than ever for senior communications professionals. Things are moving fast – as Jessamyn Katz, CEO of Heyman Associates [commented](#) – and the continued evolution of the profession will be interesting to watch.

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### **About the Research:**

Heyman Associates reviewed 146 job descriptions over the past eight years, spanning from January 2016 to December 2023. Job descriptions from January to June 2024 were also analyzed to get a sense of current trends, bringing the total number of job descriptions to 160. These job descriptions consisted of corporate communications roles at the Vice President level and higher. The roles analyzed spanned industries such as healthcare, financial services, technology, consumer, industrial, and media, as well as higher education and non-profit institutions. Heyman Associates audited approximately 24 key terms across all 160 job descriptions, calculating the frequency of the use of the term as well as the percentage of job descriptions in which the term appears.

### **About Heyman Associates:**

Established in 1989, Heyman Associates is the leading global executive search and talent consulting firm focused exclusively on C-Suite and senior talent in communications, corporate affairs, marketing, and investor relations. The firm specializes in identifying, assessing, and placing



top talent responsible for the elevation of brands and cultures, protecting reputations, and powerfully engaging stakeholders. With regional hubs in New York and San Francisco, and international presence in the UK and Germany, Heyman Associates serves clients around the world. The firm's global client base ranges from the world's leading brands, companies, foundations, and academic institutions to growth companies and nonprofits charting a new course in today's world. For more information, please visit [heymanassociates.com](http://heymanassociates.com) and follow on LinkedIn.

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