

# #FuturePProof survey reveals drastic impact of COVID-19 on UK PR industry

Submitted by: Astute.Work

Monday, 23 March 2020

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Three key issues face the UK PR industry as industry bosses rush to mitigate issues caused by COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus.

A survey by #FuturePProof has found that access to domestic customers (57.4%) and loss of income (80.9%) are the biggest immediate challenges and longer-term, more than a third of respondents (31.3%) are worried about cessation of trading.

The complete #FuturePProof COVID-19 report is supplied with this media announcement.

According to the PRCA PR Census 2019 the UK PR industry is worth GBP 14.9 billion and employs 95,000 people.

Following the introduction of emergency financial measures by the Chancellor of the Exchequer it is also clear that one group still needing urgent support remains freelancers and sole traders.

One freelancer commented: "Why are self employed/sole traders being discriminated against compared to PAYE employees? We have no sick pay, paid holidays or any other perks and are means tested if we sign up for Universal Credit."

Contingency measures being put in place by PR practitioners include new flexible working methods and patterns and prospecting for new business.

Areas of resilience include public health information and healthcare communication; crisis communications support; IT security and communication; education and learning; home entertainment and gaming; and home delivery. There has been a jump in government and public sector work.

Respondents recognised that the Government is dealing with a fast moving crisis and communicating a tough, unprecedented message as best as it can.

All results are being shared with the trade association PRCA and membership body the CIPR as they look to provide key interventions to aid business resilience and sustainability. Together they account for 40,000 practitioners in the UK.

The data has also been shared with HM Government and the Treasury as part of industry lobbying efforts.

Sarah Waddington, #FuturePProof founder and Astute.Work agency owner, said: "The results of this survey make for anxious reading. The negative impact of COVID-19 has been immediate and PR leaders are responding as fast as they can but need clarity over what help is available and how long this may last. On the plus side, a decent number of practitioners are generating new business. The hugely surprising omission is that internal communication doesn't appear to feature as a service in demand, which is disappointing."

#FuturePROOF chair and Metia managing director Stephen Waddington added: “With the industry shifting to virtual and flexible working in the space of a week it’s not surprising that respondents are reporting that immediate impacts of the crisis include isolation and juggling multiple demands including childcare, uncertainty and unemployment. It is critical that immediate support relates to mental health and wellbeing to reduce workforce anxiety and stress.”

Francis Ingham, Director-General of the PRCA, said: “These #FuturePROOF findings are stark: our industry is under sustained and unparalleled pressure because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We all need to be agile and imaginative in our response to this new environment - and the findings show that senior practitioners are moving quickly in exactly that manner.

“The findings also show appropriate appreciation of the Government’s successful and vital work in communicating its key messages in exceptionally challenging times. And I wish to endorse that sentiment by offering the PRCA’s and LGComms’ heartfelt thanks to the public sector professionals doing the hardest and most important work of their lives.”

Alastair McCapra, chief executive of the CIPR, commented: “The past few weeks have placed our professional community under tremendous strain, but they have also shown how creative, flexible professionals can respond with energy and compassion. This survey gives us a critical snapshot of how our colleagues are faring, and the case for support we will be making to Government tomorrow will be supported by the perspective it brings. Thank you to the #Futureproof community for this valuable insight.”

Other notable comments within the survey responses relate to uncertainty over the length of time COVID-19 will impact; a current lack of longer-term planning; and the impact that disinformation has had on public behaviour.

#### Survey methodology

These survey results reflect 115 responses to the survey in the 24 hours following its launch on Saturday 21 March 2020. Responses have deliberately been kept anonymous to allow PR leaders to freely share their situation.

The survey remains open and the response rate continues to rise. The survey can be accessed here: <https://www.futureproofingcomms.co.uk/thelatest/2020/3/21/futureproof-survey-help-us-help-you>

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