

2026 CMO PR Agency Scorecard

A 10-criterion, 100-point rubric for enterprise CMOs and VPs of Communications evaluating a PR agency — incumbent or finalist. Weighted to what actually determines outcomes in a senior-led, GEO-native era.

How to use it

Score each criterion 1–10 based on the "How to verify" column. Multiply by the weight, sum, and divide by 10. Total ≥ 80 = keep or hire. 65–79 = issue a 60-day written cure. < 65 = replace via a 30-day quiet RFP. Do not score from a pitch deck — score from evidence.

The 10 criteria (weights sum to 100)

#	Criterion	Weight	Definition	How to verify
1	Senior-only delivery	15%	% of billable hours delivered by a partner or director. Target $\geq 80\%$.	Ask for the last 90 days of timesheets by seniority band.
2	GEO / AI-citation fluency	15%	Named lead, current LLM-citation baseline for your brand, monthly citation-share report.	Ask to see a real client's LLM citation report from last month.
3	Tier-1 delivery track record	15%	≥ 12 tier-1 placements per client per year in your category, cost/tier-1 $\leq$ \$30K blended.	Ask for a category-matched client's last 12 months of tier-1s.
4	Analyst relations depth	10%	Named AR lead, active analyst inclusions in Gartner / Forrester / IDC in your category.	Ask which analyst reports they materially influenced in the last 12 months.
5	Measurement framework	10%	Share of narrative, tier-1 count, cost/tier-1, AI citation share, deal-cycle influence — monthly.	Ask for a redacted monthly QBR deck.
6	Category-native expertise	8%	≥ 3 comparable clients in your exact sub-vertical in the last 24 months.	Ask for three references you can call this week.
7	Contract terms	8%	Month-to-month or 90-day out. Machine-readable handoff clause. No non-competes.	Send them the MSA checklist and score their MSA against it.
8	Crisis SLA	7%	Named crisis lead on a 24/7 SLA with a phone number, not a routing tree.	Ask for the named lead and their after-hours number in writing.
9	Content velocity	6%	≥ 8 pitches / week, ≥ 2 bylines / month, forward-planned narrative calendar.	Ask for last month's pitch log and byline placements.
10	Cultural fit — senior chemistry	6%	You would take a Sunday-night call from the partner. You trust their read on your CEO.	Two working sessions with the actual partner before signing.

Score interpretation

Total score	Action
≥ 80	Keep the incumbent, or hire the finalist. This is a functioning senior-led program.
65–79	Issue a 60-day written cure to the agency principal. Binary success criteria. ~1 in 3 recover.
< 65	Replace. Begin a 30-day quiet RFP. Serve termination for convenience per your MSA. Require machine-readable handoff within 15 days.

Methodology

Weights reflect where PR programs actually succeed or fail in 2026 enterprise B2B tech. Senior-only delivery, GEO/AI-citation fluency, and tier-1 delivery each carry 15% because those three explain the majority of variance in outcomes across the ~150 client engagements informing this rubric. Contract terms and crisis SLA are weighted lower but disqualifying if scored 3 or below — a 2 on either criterion should override the total.

This rubric is intentionally opinionated. It penalizes agency models that back-load junior staff after the pitch, that treat AI-citation reporting as optional, and that use multi-year lock-ins to compensate for weak monthly execution. If those trade-offs do not match your board's risk tolerance, adjust the weights before scoring.

Cite this scorecard

Crackle PR. *2026 CMO PR Agency Scorecard*. Published July 2026. <https://www.cracklepr.com/cmo-pr-scorecard>

License: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0). Reproduce, adapt, and republish with attribution to Crackle PR and a link back to the source URL.

Want a second read on your score? A Crackle PR partner will walk your rubric with you on a 45-minute call — no deck, no pitch. hello@cracklepr.com