



MISSOURI

Missouri has historically been a geographical crossroads of sorts for the nation, between the industrialized East and the wild West. But today's Missouri has crossed an economic crossroads from a mostly rural or industrial past to the digital era, with such industries as biotech and financial services accounting for a large portion of the state's future success.

THE AGENCY PICTURE

Both Kansas City in the West and St. Louis in the East have been revived as business centers and tourist destinations. Businesses benefiting from the influx of new people to the cities include hospitals, building contractors, restaurants, and banks – and PR firms naturally benefit, too.

Still, not everything about the state's business environment is rosy, agency pros note. The national phenomenon of corporate consolidation, for example, has turned a lot of former business headquarters into subsidiaries with downsized numbers of workers, though Melissa Lackey, Standing PR SVP and COO, says that has not led to diminished talent. "There is a wonderful pool... of freelancers and people who have been downsized in recent years and decided not to go in the corporate or agency route and to strike out on their own," she says.

Fleishman-Hillard's headquarters are in St. Louis, and Weber Shandwick has a presence in Missouri, but on the whole, agencies tend to be independent and relatively small. Even so, both Kansas City and St. Louis have 10 or more agencies with net income in excess of \$1 million, according to statistics from *The Kansas City Star* and the local PRSA.

Though each agency in the state may have specialty areas, Vandiver Group president and CEO Donna Vandiver says PR firms usually work with a variety of clients.

"We have to be generalists to appeal to the broader segment of our client base, to do a whole lot of different services that our clients require," says Vandiver, who adds that national companies trying to improve their presence in the state tend to hire local firms rather than rely on out-of-state agencies.

"We've been told by clients that the Midwest is a bit unusual in that it requires people who know the market in order to be successful," she adds. "They can't just come in here and use a firm outside the market and be as successful."

Barkley Evergreen & Partners EVP Mike Swenson notes that his firm's clients and those of others in Kansas City and the state in general often are national and don't necessarily care where his agency is based.

"Geography is not that important anymore," he says. "It's not so [much] where you're based as what expertise you have."

Susan Veidt, senior partner and

PR in the heartland

► "Show Me State" communications pros find the Midwest to be a great platform for local, national, even global outreach. By *Ted McKenna*



SELECTED PR FIRMS

Barkley Evergreen & Partners
Bretz Public Relations
Corporate Communications Group
Dickens Co.
Fleishman-Hillard
McCormick Co.
Midwest Public Relations
MMG Worldwide
Parris Communications
Solomon Turner
Standing Partnership
Synergy Group
Trozzolo Communications Group
Vandiver Group
Weber Shandwick

FORTUNE 1,000 COMPANIES

Emerson Electric
Express Scripts
Anheuser-Busch
Ameren
Monsanto
Leggett & Platt
Charter Communications
Peabody Energy
H&R Block
Graybar Electric
Energizer Holdings
Solutia
A.G. Edwards
Great Plains Energy
DST Systems
Arch Coal
Furniture Brands International
Olin
Kellwood
Brown Shoe
Aquila
O'Reilly Automotive
Maverick Tube
AMC Entertainment
Ralcorp Holdings
Sigma-Aldrich
Laclede Group
Centene

GM of Fleishman in St. Louis, says the state's central location makes reaching clients across the country easy and that its lower cost of living and vibrant cultural environment help attract and retain employees.

"More and more people realize places like St. Louis and Kansas City offer a balance between work and family rarely found on the coasts," Veidt notes via e-mail.

THE CORPORATE STORY

For the large corporations in the state, many of their PR needs are as much, if not more, national or international than local. Financial institutions like H&R Block, A.G. Edwards, and Edward D. Jones; consumer-focused companies like Anheuser-Busch, Hallmark Cards, and Hardee's; and agricultural giant Monsanto, among others, must operate in many diverse markets.

Emerson Electric, for example, makes a wide range of industrial power products and has a marketing presence in more than 150 countries, but doesn't have an in-house PR team. Company spokesman Mark Polzin, a Fleishman SVP and partner, says the company's PR needs require representation in such far-flung places as Beijing, Hong Kong, and London, though the company nevertheless remains well-anchored to its com-

munity in St. Louis through, among other things, charitable activities in education and the arts.

Beth Rusert, VP of PR and corporate communications at Maritz, a provider of loyalty programs to credit card and other corporations, says international issues like rising gasoline prices or terrorism affect businesses in Missouri as much as any other state.

"All of these things truly impact all," Rusert says.

Though the Missouri economy is quite diversified, a particular focus by state authorities and educational institutions has been biotechnology. President Bush may recently have vetoed federal funding of stem-cell research, but Missouri will vote on the issue itself in November and sees biotech as a key area of future growth – and particularly relevant given the state's agricultural roots.

The Danforth Plant Sciences Area is one recipient of increased funding in the area of biotech, and Chuck Reitter, president of PRSA's St. Louis chapter and former public information manager for the St. Louis International Airport Expansion Program, notes that Missouri farmers are also looking to capitalize on renewed interest in ethanol products, including E85 ethanol.

THE MEDIA SCENE

Kansas City and St. Louis are essentially one-paper towns, *The Kansas City Star* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, respectively, but both have a version of the *Business Journal*, metropolitan business papers published by American City Business Journals. Each contains real-estate information and other business news. Columbia and other smaller cities have dailies, as well, plus burgeoning online news sites.

The journalism school at the University of Missouri is regularly listed as one of the best in the US. Graduates often wind up at local news stations and newspapers, helping foster top-quality news reporting, Reitter says. The two major cities have strong local NPR broadcasts and are served by ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox stations.

The national media may not cover the state as much as some Missourians believe is deserved, but Solomon Turner partner Steve Solomon notes that the strong blue-collar roots of Kansas City and St. Louis, mixed with a more conservative, rural population, plus the many military families who work at defense contractors or local military bases, certainly made for interesting news when the state was too close to call in the past two presidential elections. ■