

PHIFER & COMPANY

2026 Communications, Marketing & Branding Salary Guide

National U.S. Market Data & Hiring Trends

Compiled by Phifer & Company | 2026 Edition
<https://phifercompany.com>

About This Guide

Phifer & Company has specialized in executive recruitment for communications, public relations, and marketing for over 28 years. This 2026 guide reflects compensation ranges observed through Phifer & Company searches and placements, cross-referenced with national salary data to ensure broad market accuracy.

Salaries in this guide represent base compensation. Total compensation, including bonuses, profit sharing, and equity, can add 10 to 30 percent or more at senior levels. It is also important to factor in bonuses and long-term incentives such as deferred compensation, stock options, and performance-based awards, which can represent a significant portion of total earnings particularly at the VP and C-suite levels. Ranges reflect geographic variation, company size, sector (agency, in-house, or nonprofit), and years of experience. Major markets such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles typically command a 15 to 25 percent premium above national medians.

Use this guide as a benchmark and reference point.

How to Read This Guide

Each salary table is organized by title and shows three ranges:

- Lower Range (25th percentile): Candidates newer to the role, still building relevant skills, or in lower cost-of-living markets.
- Mid-Range (Median): Candidates who can perform core responsibilities independently.
- Upper Range (75th–90th percentile): Senior performers ready for promotion, based in major metro markets, or bringing highly specialized expertise.

Note: Ranges may vary significantly based on company revenue, industry sector, and individual negotiation. Nonprofit and government roles typically skew 15 to 25 percent lower than corporate counterparts at equivalent levels.

C-Suite & Senior Leadership

Executive-level communications and marketing professionals command the highest compensation in our field. Salaries at this tier are particularly sensitive to company size, sector, and the executive's ability to demonstrate business impact. It is important to note that for C-suite and senior leadership roles, all-in compensation including bonuses and long-term incentives can often double or triple base salary, making total package negotiation especially critical at this level.

Chief Communications Officer (CCO)

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
CCO Midmarket	\$225,000	\$295,000	\$390,000
CCO Large Corporation	\$265,000	\$370,000	\$520,000
CCO Fortune 500	\$375,000	\$520,000	\$690,000+

Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
CMO Midmarket	\$200,000	\$280,000	\$385,000
CMO Large Corporation	\$295,000	\$415,000	\$575,000
CMO Fortune 500	\$400,000	\$575,000	\$805,000+

Vice President Level

VP-level communications and marketing leaders are among the most actively recruited professionals in our field. Demand is particularly strong for leaders who combine traditional communications expertise with digital fluency and measurable business acumen.

VP of Communications

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
VP, Communications	\$190,000	\$255,000	\$330,000
VP, Corp. Communications	\$195,000	\$230,000	\$305,000
SVP, Communications	\$260,000	\$350,000	\$485,000+

VP of Marketing

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
VP, Marketing	\$260,000	\$330,000	\$430,000
VP, Marketing Comms.	\$215,000	\$280,000	\$375,000

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
VP, Marketing & Comms.	\$195,000	\$260,000	\$345,000

Director & Manager Level

Director and manager-level roles represent the largest hiring volume in communications and marketing recruitment. These positions span a wide range depending on whether the role is in-house corporate, agency-side, or within a nonprofit or government organization.

Communications & PR Directors and Managers

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
Director, Communications/PR	\$110,000	\$145,000	\$190,000
Sr. Director, Communications	\$155,000	\$200,000	\$265,000
PR/Comms. Manager	\$115,000	\$145,000	\$190,000
Sr. Comms. Manager	\$160,000	\$205,000	\$260,000

Marketing Directors and Managers

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
Marketing Director	\$140,000	\$185,000	\$245,000
Marketing Manager	\$110,000	\$145,000	\$195,000
Content Strategist	\$100,000	\$125,000	\$165,000

Advertising Executive Leadership

Senior advertising executives command significant premiums in agency and holding company environments, particularly those who combine creative vision with business development acumen. Compensation at this level is highly variable based on agency size, billings under management, and individual track record.

Chief Creative Officer & EVP/SVP Level

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
Chief Creative Officer	\$250,000	\$375,000	\$550,000+
EVP, Creative	\$200,000	\$285,000	\$400,000
SVP, Creative Director	\$175,000	\$240,000	\$340,000
EVP, Account Management	\$195,000	\$270,000	\$385,000
SVP, Account Management	\$160,000	\$220,000	\$310,000

Senior Branding Leadership

Senior branding leaders are among the most sought-after executives in our field, particularly as organizations invest heavily in brand differentiation and reputation. Demand for executives who can bridge brand strategy with business growth has driven meaningful compensation increases at this level over the past two years.

Chief Brand Officer & VP/SVP Brand Strategy

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
Chief Brand Officer	\$240,000	\$340,000	\$500,000+
SVP, Brand Strategy	\$195,000	\$265,000	\$375,000
VP, Brand Strategy	\$165,000	\$225,000	\$310,000

2026 Market Trends & Insights

Based on our placements and market research, Phifer & Company has identified several compensation and hiring trends shaping the communications and marketing landscape in 2026:

Financial Literacy Commands a Premium

For CCO and communications director-level hires, the ability to connect reputation management to business outcomes, including understanding P&L, investor relations, and stakeholder risk, now commands a 15 to 20 percent salary premium above peers with equivalent communications experience alone.

AI Credentials Command a Growing Premium

Communications and marketing professionals who hold AI-related credentials from accredited institutions are increasingly commanding a 10 to 15 percent salary premium above peers at equivalent experience levels. As organizations look to integrate AI into content strategy, media monitoring, campaign analytics, and audience targeting, candidates who can demonstrate formal AI fluency rather than just tool familiarity are standing out in searches at every level from manager through VP. We expect this premium to grow through 2027 as demand continues to outpace supply.

Specialization in digital communications and social media strategy adds an estimated 10–20% to base compensation. Candidates with strong analytics, paid media fluency, or platform expertise (particularly LinkedIn, earned media, and owned content) are in particularly high demand.

Counter-Offers Are at Historic Highs

Retaining talent is currently less expensive than replacing it. Organizations making offers for experienced communications leaders should come in with their best and final offer immediately. Low ball offers are frequently rejected or met with aggressive counter-offers from the candidate's current employer.

Major Market Premium: 15 to 25 Percent

Candidates in New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles earn meaningfully more than the national median.

Nonprofit and Government Roles

Communications professionals in nonprofit and government environments typically earn 15 to 25 percent below comparable corporate roles, though total compensation including benefits and flexibility can narrow this gap. Demand remains strong in mission-driven organizations for senior leaders who can cross between sectors.

Hiring Insights: A Job Market Unlike Any We've Seen Before

We are currently in a hiring environment that looks very different from what most professionals experienced over the past decade.

For more than 15 years, much of the professional hiring ecosystem revolved around a single platform—LinkedIn. However, the platform is no longer operating the way it did even four or five years ago.

Today, while there are still a significant number of open positions across communications, marketing, and branding, many organizations are choosing to post roles only on their own company websites—or in some cases not publicly at all.

This creates a challenge for candidates who rely primarily on applying to publicly posted roles rather than actively networking into their next position.

We estimate that roughly 30 percent of leadership roles today are effectively created during the hiring process after organizations meet exceptional individuals and recognize how their strengths could benefit the organization.

The result is what many companies experience as a 'perfect storm' in hiring.

In many cases, organizations are now experiencing hiring timelines of three to six months for leadership positions, which can result in lost revenue opportunities and additional strain on existing teams.

Emerging Leadership Roles in Marketing & Communications

As marketing, communications, and digital strategy continue to converge, several leadership roles have emerged or expanded significantly in recent years.

Title	Lower Range	Mid Range	Upper Range
Chief Growth Officer (CGO)	\$300,000	\$450,000	\$650,000+
VP / Head of Growth	\$210,000	\$320,000	\$420,000
Director of Growth Marketing	\$150,000	\$190,000	\$250,000
Director of Content Marketing	\$150,000	\$195,000	\$260,000
Head of Social & Influencer Strategy	\$165,000	\$220,000	\$295,000
Head of Marketing Technology (MarTech)	\$175,000	\$230,000	\$310,000
AI Strategy Lead (Marketing/Comms)	\$160,000	\$220,000	\$300,000
Head of Audience / Community	\$165,000	\$220,000	\$300,000
Head of Corporate Narrative	\$185,000	\$240,000	\$325,000

About Phifer & Company

Phifer & Company is a leading executive search and recruitment firm specializing in communications, public relations, marketing, and advertising. With over 28 years of experience and a proprietary database of more than 150,000 candidates, we partner with organizations ranging from Fortune 500 companies to growing midmarket firms to place top talent in roles that make a difference.

We conduct searches at every level, from VP and director searches to C-suite executive placements, and across every sector including Private Equity, corporate, consumer, AI, nonprofit, healthcare, financial services, Technology, Lifestyle, Etc..

To discuss your hiring needs or explore career opportunities, contact us at <https://phifercompany.com>

or hello@phifercompany.com

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