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WHO IS ALMANAC WHO

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Prior to joining FIPRA Slovakia, a leading government relations and public affairs firm, Tomáš worked as an executive assistant at Cassidy & Associates in Washington, DC, where he was responsible for business development and international accounts. He also worked as an assistant to the Member of the German Bundestag. Since joining FIPRA Slovakia Tomáš has been primarily responsible for management of accounts in Defense & Security, ICT, New Technologies, Transportation & Logistics and Finance. Tomáš has a strong grounding in international political and economic relations. He is a member of several expert committees and advisory boards. He holds a M.A. in Political Sciences from the University of Vienna in Austria as well as Master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from Slovakia.

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FIPRA Slovakia – the only full-service
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firm in Slovakia
can be found on page 78

COVID-19 HAS STRESS-TESTED THE GOVERNMENT RELATIONS INDUSTRY

The pandemic has affected all industries, but it has had a bigger impact on some firms and sectors than on others. The risks of infection from different activities, the ability of businesses to operate remotely, and the policies to contain the spread of the virus have each played a role and affected current business, and expectations about the future.

Industries that rely on personal interactions have suffered the hardest hit. This includes a variety of recreational services, such as gyms, accommodation, and food services (pubs, cafes, and restaurants), that recorded a sales drop of over 50%. However, the pandemic has also influenced many consulting services, whose nature of work requires face-to-face contact with clients and partners.

The government relations industry has not been an exception in this regard, on the contrary. After more than two years, it is safe to say that many government and public affairs professionals have finally adapted to the new reality and have found new ways of working and collaborating. This applies at least to the ones who have survived the unprecedented stress test of their services and (more importantly) their relationships.

Among the biggest challenges for public affairs firms was not only spending extra hours monitoring, analysing and navigating a new influx of pandemic-related rules, but also ensuring that clients keep receiving the best possible advisory they are used to, no matter how uncertain or changing the political, regulatory, or business environments suddenly became. Firms generally differ in their ability to withstand the disruption, and in the decisions they take in the face of the considerable uncertainty about future business conditions. Many firms offering public affairs services have tried to endure this difficult time by hoping everything goes back to normal sooner than later. However, this approach was proved wrong, and they are no longer in business.

What is more, the pandemic has tested the very core of all firms active in the government relations industry – i.e., the quality of their working relationships. While many firms offering public affairs services used to boast about their extensive network of valuable contacts across all spheres of our society, the pandemic has revealed the naked truth. Strict lockdown rules and social distancing have made it impossible to meet in person and exchange sensitive pieces of information on various important matters. As a result, many firms on the market have been forced to improvise and undertake alternative risky solutions since they could not get ahold of their assets to consult matters in real time. Such strategies backfired, and many firms have significantly cut down their services portfolio, leaving out the public affairs and government relations services completely.

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There is no doubt that the dust will settle, and the situation on the market will stabilize at some point. Many firms will give in to temptation and start offering public affairs services again. However, looking onwards and upwards, the biggest lesson for all firms active in the government relations industry in the post-pandemic era should be to constantly invest in growing and protecting their network at all costs and building high-quality working relationships that last!