

Marketing Feature

Grappling with gravitas: new law firm marketing takes personal approach



By Carolyn
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We all like to do business with people we like. This familiar phrase has become the cornerstone of the latest light in marketing: relationship-

building. Astute lawyers have laid down their old-school strategies, formal firm biographies and lackluster newsletters in favor of cultivating contacts via networking and ad campaigns showing partners hard at work in their shirt-sleeves.

Today, websites that reference attorneys by first name, company profiles that paint a picture of a caring culture, and firm marketing materials that show volunteer and after-hour pursuits have taken the place of the staid messages that, for years, portrayed the serious nature of the law.

But how far should attorneys — and their marketing advisors — tread on the continuum of gravitas to personal? Can they leverage the opportunities inherent in relationship-building while respecting the dignity of the law?

A valid struggle

Many firms are grappling with how to initiate the steps to forge personal relationships while maintaining the gravitas of their profession. The struggle seems to be valid.

Attorneys want to be known for being smart problem-solvers who understand their clients and their clients' businesses. The law is a serious matter, and those who practice have made a serious commitment.

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Making it personal

Clients look for lawyers with whom they feel a connection, either via a business referral, personal tie or other association. They want lawyers who not only understand their business and goals, but are personally invested in their business success.

Sharing your passion

Connecting with clients is not just based on expertise and experience. A four-hour round of golf or dinner-and-theater outing with a highly qualified prospect may do more than any direct-mail piece or press release can muster.

Sharing your passions outside the workplace — family, hobbies, educational interests — is vital to creating and building a successful relationship. Don't be afraid to let clients and prospects see who you are beyond the business suit and mahogany law office.

Writing to be read

Moving away from old-school marketing involves your writing, too. We all are bombarded with print and electronic communications via e-mail, snail mail and even mass fax systems. Few have the time or energy to take it all in.

So, whether it's your firm brochure, annual report or holiday card, pay careful attention to your messages. Use short sentences, active voice and action verbs. Don't include every nuance of your experience, capabilities and services. Keep your messages succinct. Focus on *benefits* to your clients, not just the *features* of what you do. Invite conversations about you and your practice.

Seeking synergy

Taking relationship-building to the next step often leads to assisting clients in areas outside the confines of the law. The movie "Pay it Forward" starring actor Kevin Spacey focused on

the notion of paying a favor not back but forward... repaying good deeds not with payback, but with new good deeds done to new people.

Whether facilitating an introduction of a client to another professional in banking or finance, or passing along articles and ideas that impact a prospect's industry, look to do things to help others that may not appear at first glance to have immediate return-on-investment for you.

Moving forward

Introducing ideas that break from the traditional is often challenging for firms of all sizes. However, small changes in lawyers' attitudes toward marketing and interactions with clients will position lawyers and their firms well, as personal relationships become pivotal to business development in the highly competitive marketplace for legal services. **RLW**

