

# More Is Not Always Better Marketing

BY CAROLYN S. LAVIN



As law firms reach sophisticated levels of website development, strive for comprehensive firm branding and roll out the most creative paid ad campaigns in history, it is important for lawyers and their business develop-

ment gurus to stay focused on the original goals of the projects at hand.

While we are all tempted to add another article to the newsletter, another page to the firm's website description, or another speaker to the upcoming seminar in our well-intended attempts to make a great existing marketing activity ever greater, trying to accomplish too many goals in one project or adding more facets to an existing project can sometimes shut down a potentially fruitful new business effort!

And, while satisfying the personal agendas of myriad partners is important, garnering a profitable end-result for the firm should be the top priority.

To avoid the "Big Digs" of lawyer marketing, keep the idea of simplicity in mind in each aspect of your marketing endeavors.

## Pontificating In Publications

Of all the elements of a comprehensive marketing plan, publications are the most challenging activity to keep simple.

With marketing-savvy attorneys willing to write compelling newsletter articles or other written materials on new caselaw or various issues of interest to clients, who is the marketing director to complain of the length? Costs aside, it may be argued that one can always just add another page.

One of the easiest ways to get bogged down in a written article is to try to address too many audiences. In most cases, lawyers should clearly identify the potential reader. Most often, it is another lawyer, a non-lawyer business person or an individual whose interest may lie in a personal matter such as an estate plan or a divorce.

With the goal of clarity at the forefront of publication editing, it is critical to realize that an epic legal treatise will actually dissuade the reader from paying attention to the newsletter or other written piece.

And while the addition of zesty sub-heads, pull-quotes and graphics will break up the copy-dense material, no amount of razzmatazz will save the reader from deeming it copy-dense and lobbing it into the trash.

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## Websites Know No Limits

Many law firm websites are the newfound answer to firm brochures. No four-color printing. No stacks and stacks of outdated material taking up space. No partners wondering whether the firm realized any return-on-investment from that substantial cash outlay.

For new recruits, prospective clients and referring attorneys, the website — like a brochure — provides the basics about the firm and a wealth of detail about the practice groups and the partners.

Some of the most exciting law firm websites offer creative graphics and special client intranets. As the outer limits of law firm websites know no bounds, it is important to realize that, in some cases, too much text can dilute the message.

For example, I recently perused one of Boston's top law firm websites to investigate the firm's strength in a certain legal area.

What I found was some very interesting capabilities in one narrow area of the law, but I almost missed the most captivating copy hidden six or seven screens down.

Highlights of the same information designed to show the firm's capabilities — and illicit all the same search-engine-friendly options — may have been more concisely presented in a mere one to two screens.

Website pages, unlike a four-color brochure, does not allow the reader to glance at the entire piece, read the most prominent text and then settle in to review the body copy.

Website readers need to be engaged in the first few lines of the practice group or attorney or firm description with an attention-getting but simple outline of what information will follow.

## Events: Does Glitz Live Here?

Clients are deluged by seminars. There are ads in the papers and on the radio, special invitation-only events, and featured speakers at civic and trade organizations.

Even with this abundance of seminar opportunities, a well-organized and appropriately crafted event is still one of the best ways to develop new business from existing clients and to introduce the firm to new prospects.

Each ingredient of a seminar — from the creation of initial invitation, to the development of content to be delivered, to the food and floor plan for the post-event reception — must be carefully scrutinized



to keep the primary end goal of business development in the forefront.

In seminar planning, it is especially easy to get blindsided by the egos and ambitions of certain attorneys or

the burning desire just to get it done!

Consider the event invitation. It is often tempting to outline the entire seminar in a large-sized invitation that provides, for example, biographical sketches on all the speakers, anoints the moderator and offers an extensive agenda. If there is, indeed, enough substantive content to merit a full-

day seminar, a carefully crafted and expansive recapitulation of the subjects to be covered might be warranted.

For many clients, however, the opportunity to learn about a topical area such as the recent changes in the estate law may require only a few-hours seminar that is designed to touch on all the critical issues and instill confidence in the lawyer's ability to provide a sound perspective.

After all, a seminar is not intended to teach non-lawyer clients how to practice law themselves, but rather to understand the issues about which a lawyer can fairly and accurately advise them.

And, there is always the issue of refreshments. Does a well-stocked open bar and lavish and exotic hors d'oeuvres say that your firm is top-notch, or that glitz lives here?

Unless your catering budget is limitless, a tasteful array of wine and beer mixed with some simple finger-foods often sends a meaningful message that food is not the focus of efforts to educate your clients at the seminars.

## Fine-Tuning Your Message

Whether you are "pitching" your idea to the media or responding to a request to be part of a story, remember to keep your message simple.

In the "pitching" scenario, be sure to capsule what it is about your particular legal win or personal accomplishment that will be compelling to the editor you target. If you have just won a big case, state — simply — the issue of first-impression, the gigantic settlement figure or the novel nuance on which the case was won.

If you are creating a press release, remember to include the basic components: the who, what, when, where and why, right in the first paragraph.

If your explanation is via the phone, think long and hard about how to condense

the key information so it is simple and easy-to-follow. It is not that editors will not understand the complex version of your story, it is just a good communications strategy to start with the highlights and let the details unfold in a mutual dialogue.

If your opportunity to shine is a result of an inquiry initiated by the media, the same recipe for success holds true: Keep your answers short and sweet. Think about two or three major points you want to convey in the interview. After all, a good interviewee relishes the chance to address his or her own agenda, too.

For example, I recently chatted with a junior partner about how to disseminate his own firm-centered messages while being interviewed about a case he won. We decided that there were, indeed, some opportunities to highlight, unobtrusively, a particular practice group at the firm since the collective expertise of the firm's attorneys was pivotal in his success.

Just as too many cooks may spoil the broth, too many messages may decrease your chance that any of your points are heard.

## Meeting Magic

A well-crafted meeting, whether for your particular department or just one client, can be a lawyer's chance to get new business from an existing client or solidify a relationship with clients, staff or other audiences.

If, for instance, you are interested in conveying a new firm policy to an internal audience, state the news the audience has been waiting to hear and then back it up with explanation. If your audience is so intent on getting to the true meaning of your meeting, they will listen only half-heartedly to your well-written introduction, anticipating the main message.

Similarly with one-on-one or small client meetings, it is a good idea to establish right from the start — or, preferably, before you meet in a well-crafted memo or e-mail — the exact purpose of the meeting.

While internal camaraderie and client relations are necessary meeting ingredients in the time-stressed world in which we live, overdoing the pleasantries does not forward the firm's business development goals.

## More Is Not Better

While the lure of gaining additional marketing mileage for your projects by including an additional speaker to your seminar, an additional page to your newsletter or more fluff to your meeting is often felt by marketing attorneys and staff at all levels, these actions often produce an end result with diminishing opportunities for your return on investment.

Reaching the right people in the right way with the right message is what marketing legal services is all about.

So next time your firm or marketing decision-makers are tempted to go for the gourmet, remember that savoring the simplicity will often create the most success.