

MARKETING the Law Firm

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PRINT, DIGITAL, SOCIAL AND FACE-TO-FACE STRATEGIES

TODAY, there are multiple options for marketing law firms, including print, digital, outdoor and social media, along with traditional face-to-face strategies. But careful planning is essential for firms and their attorneys to develop the right approach, according to South Florida marketing and public relations professionals.

"Effective marketing for law firms is all about the fundamentals," says Don Silver, COO, Boardroom Communications in Plantation. "Staying relevant, staying on the radar of those who count, giving back, treating people right, helping people solve problems and find solutions and doing great work never goes out of style. No amount of PR, advertising or networking will work if you are not taking care of the basics. People do business with people they like, respect and can count on."

Tadd Schwartz, founder and president of Schwartz Media Strategies in Miami, says one of the biggest marketing mistakes a law firm can make is undertaking a program without a long-term view and a defined set of strategic goals. "Publicity won't move the needle if it doesn't incorporate the right message and in turn support the brand," he says. "Neither will marketing."

DEVELOP A CLEAR LONG-TERM PLAN

Law firms and attorneys need to make a commitment to their marketing efforts and establish realistic goals, metrics and priorities before implementing specific strategies, says Jeanne A. Becker, senior vice president, Wragg & Casas Public Relations in Miami. "Marketing tactics take time and money, and are not for a law firm that is not committed to a long-term program."

Becker says the best starting point is developing a marketing plan that includes business development, client retention, branding, public relations, social media, blogging, website development, direct marketing and print and online strategies.

Silver adds that marketing programs take time to deliver results. "With outreach efforts, don't focus on getting new business right away," he says. "Don't take your eye off the ball and stay focused on your work. About 70 to 80 percent of new matters will come from existing clients and contacts. Not keeping close touch or providing good service and value will hurt your practice. No amount of new business will cure dissatisfied clients or churn."

Marketing strategies are most effective when they are customized and tailored to the specific needs of law firms and attorneys, says Michelle Martinez Reyes, regional marketing and business development manager, Hunton & Williams in Miami, and chair of the South Florida City Group for the Legal Marketing Association's Southeastern Chapter.

"Strategies that tend to be most effective in today's market are those that are innovative, adaptable and are focused on the needs of a firm's clients and defined target audience within a key industry and sector," she says. "Firms that are progressive enough to monitor and use their customer feedback, (and even employee input), for improvement and competitive advantage, tend to be the leaders."

EMPHASIZE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

For many firms and attorneys, building a position as an industry expert or thought leader has been a highly successful strategy. "Bylined articles, getting attorneys quoted as sources in targeted publications, speaking opportunities, award nominations and the promotion of completed transactions, verdicts and settlements are effective in creating and maintaining focus on the attorney's particular practice areas," says Becker.

Lori Rabinowitz, founder and president, Marca, in Fort Lauderdale, cites the example of a South Florida attorney who focused his marketing program on becoming a thought leader in gaming. Through an effective public relations campaign, the attorney was mentioned in national media, wrote an op-ed article for a daily newspaper and led a panel on gaming at HistoryMiami. "Taking one area of an attorney's practice and developing an integrating campaign on different platforms can be very successful," she says. "Firms and attorneys can look for an industry niche or defined area of practice that lends itself to marketing."

Traditional print media plays a key role in the marketing mix for professional services firms seeking to build awareness, support the brand and reach out to prospective clients. "Print can be an excellent platform

for thought leadership, as well as building a firm's public image," says Reyes. "Print media can be used for advertising, advertorials, tombstones, branding campaigns or a variety of editorial pieces and author placements. It is the traditional vehicle for connecting with clients, prospects and the community at-large."

Because the traditional media market is shrinking, earned editorial content in publications that reach prospective clients is now at a premium, says Becker. "Firms need to be in the business of breaking news, creating stories and shaping the conversation around their areas of focus," Becker says. "Today's savvy firms are focusing on earned editorial coverage, social media, targeted advertising and their own editorial content to offset the effects of a shrinking media landscape while connecting with their audiences via several access points."

USE BLOGGING AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Blogging can be an effective strategy for attorneys and law firms seeking to position themselves as leaders in their practice areas, says several marketing professionals. In turn, that original content – as well as press releases, videos and firm activities can be promoted through social media sites like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

"I'm a big fan of blogging," says Rabinowitz. "You don't need a budget for it, and it's a good way for attorneys who are not comfortable with face-to-face marketing to reach out to individuals. It can also pay big dividends in your branding."

Becker says blogs can complement public relations efforts to show the attorney's knowledge and build credibility. Law firms using effective search engine optimization (SEO) techniques can use also key words from their blogs to ensure that online searches are productive.

However, different approaches to blogging and social media are necessary, depending on whether a firm focuses on a business (B2B) or consumer (B2C) market, according to Silver. "For B2B law firm clients, blogs serve as the mother ship to feed social media," he says. "For these firms, LinkedIn and Twitter are most

appropriate. With B2C firms, we typically make use of all major social media. We also make extensive use of tags and links to relevant pages on the firm's website."

As for social media campaigns, Becker says that Twitter is great for branding, pushing out information and creating buy-in but is too consumer oriented for corporate law firms. LinkedIn is effective for building networks/referrals and pushing out information, but is only as good as the time invested to constantly communicate with your network. Videos can be expensive and time consuming, are limited in use and may not be worth doing, she adds.

While blogging and social media campaigns can help increase engagement with target audiences and improving search engine rankings, law firms need to commit time and resources for these marketing tools to pay off. "It's essential to post regularly on topics that will interest others," Silver says. "You also have to engage your contacts by commenting on what they post, possibly take the conversation off-line to build on the relationship. Like traditional networking, it is important to respect the other person's time."

Sharing interesting articles, firm news, photos, videos and occasional entertaining posts will help keep you in the game, Silver adds. Conversely, posting too often and making it all about the firm will be a turn-off to the audience.

Noting that favorable media coverage should be shared via social media portals and digital marketing pieces, Schwartz said one of his law firm clients has used blogging to brand itself as an authority on real estate and business matters. The firm has blogs on commercial mortgages, homebuilders, and inbound investment and trends driving the Miami economy. "The blogs provide original content from attorneys, which is leveraged via the firm's social media platforms, special events, and our ongoing public relations campaign," he adds.

FOCUS ON NETWORKING

While digital and social media continue to grow in importance, face-to-face networking activities remain the "bread and butter" marketing channel for many South Florida attorneys. For example, Rabinowitz suggest inviting clients or potential clients to a law firm presentation on a "hot topic" related to specific practice areas. "Just getting in front of the right people is invaluable," she adds.

Reyes says a traditional approach to face-to-face networking involves getting involved in business, civic or charitable organizations. She adds, "The key is to pick and choose organizations that would be a natural fit and participate in forums that would be most valuable to you and your clients."

Silver agrees with the importance of becoming involved in organizations and causes that law firms and their attorneys really care about or enjoy. He recommends focusing on no more than three organizations, and suggests studying them in advance to determine which are most likely to provide a mutually beneficial experience.

"With charities, don't simply write a check," he adds. "Get involved on a committee, join a board, attend meetings and events and spread the good word. This is true with any organization where you get involved. Let others see you in action volunteering your time and achieving results for the cause."

Becker says that intimate face-to-face networking activities with groups of 15-20 people are effective for many types of practices. Examples include hosting legal briefings for clients and prospects, scheduling breakfasts with accountants and consultants, to promote referrals or hosting proprietary educational seminars tied to practice areas that can be promoted to key audiences and the public.

"Attending business networking groups can be effective provided you attend often, the members are high quality and ultimately lead to referrals," she says. "Client contacts, prospects and the names of referral sources should be collected into a firm-wide database used for future communications such as client alerts, blog notifications, announcements and holiday cards."

Silver adds that many South Florida attorneys have been successful in generating new business by being involved in American Bar Association, The Florida Bar and other national, state and local professional associations. Participating in pro bono programs and initiatives can also create a positive impression and build an attorney's reputation, Silver adds. "Volunteer service is one way to become known in your field, so consider making a commitment to a meaningful cause."

MEASURE THE RESULTS

Whatever marketing strategies are implemented, firms and attorneys should

track the results and measure the return on investment (ROI). That's the best way to determine which strategies are most effective, so internal resources can be deployed in the right direction.

"There's no one-size-fits-all method for measuring results," says Schwartz. "The best way to determine whether your campaign is working is to evaluate whether your underlying messages are penetrating your target audiences and resonating on a consistent basis." For example, a dedicated phone number or email address can be used as a tracking mechanism for advertising or public relations campaigns. In any case, firm should set measurable business goals and then gauge whether the marketing program is advancing those goals, Schwartz says.

Here are some ways that firms can track their results:

- Has there been an increase in casework across the firm's growth areas?
- Has there been an uptick in traffic on the firm's website?
- Are publications that reach the target audience running your byline or feature articles?
- Are existing clients and referral sources taking note of your articles or other marketing and publicity efforts?
- Are your email newsletters and other messages being opened by recipients?
- Are individuals subscribing to your blog, following you on Twitter or connecting with you via LinkedIn?

Is anyone responding to your posts on Facebook or LinkedIn or to your videos on YouTube?

When it comes to web marketing, Silver says analytics programs can track not only the number of visitors, but also the time spent on the site, most-viewed pages and number of forms filled in requesting information. "If you are tracking your Google rankings, the more targeted and relevant content you are posting to your site, blog and social media, the greater your ranking should be," he adds.

For certain practice areas, billboards and TV ads provide law firms with excellent tracking mechanisms for measurement, says Becker. "They are proven business generators for personal injury and criminal law firms, but they are not effective for corporate, transactional or defense firms," she adds.

Reyes notes that professional services firms can most readily measure ROI

in areas involving public relations and related business development opportunities. “Relationship marketing can be tracked and measured over the course of multiple impressions and activities,” she says. “Referral sources from key networks can also be tracked to see what’s producing results.”


MAKE MARKETING A PRIORITY

In South Florida’s competitive environment, law firms and attorneys need to make marketing and business development an ongoing priority, according to Reyes. “Team up with business development and marketing professionals who are connected to your community, your industry and your clients,” she says. “Listen to their advice, and develop strategies that will advance your business goals.”

In addition, attorneys should monitor all changes coming out of The Florida Bar regarding social media, advertising and direct marketing, says Becker. The Handbook on Lawyer Advertising and Solicitation finalized several changes in the spring of 2014. When in doubt, contact The Florida Bar regarding proposed marketing projects and allow plenty of advance time for them to review materials, provide feedback and approvals, she says.

Rabinowitz noted that The Florida Bar asked LinkedIn to eliminate the word “expertise” in attorney profiles. In response, the social media site changed its headings to “experience” and “skills and

endorsements,” a benefit to attorneys.

Whether planning a social media campaign, hosting in-person seminars or supporting a worthy cause, attorneys and law firms can use the power of the media as a solid foundation for their marketing activities, according to the region’s professionals. As they say, a byline or a feature article in a print publication offers instant credibility, builds the brand, and supports social and digital media marketing campaigns – a winning formula for South Florida law firms and their attorneys. 



Tadd Schwartz