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5 Steps To Build Your Law Firm Brand

By **Jonathan Randles**

Law360, New York (October 30, 2014, 9:47 PM ET) -- Some lawyers bristle at the idea that they have to market themselves in order to attract and retain new clients, holding the belief that legal smarts and quality work alone will be enough to grow their practice. And while those qualities are essential to being a successful attorney, it's also true that even a bit of marketing savvy can go a long way to getting more work.

Enter law firm branding. The concept of developing a brand to more effectively market legal services to potential clients and distinguish attorneys from competitors has taken on increased importance over the last decade.

Law360 spoke to experts for some key points law firms and attorneys should keep in mind if they want to build their own brand.

Be Specific

Lawyers, by and large, are trained to be generalists, versed in many areas of the law so that they don't miss out on any potential business. But that way of thinking can hinder branding, which is usually more effective when it's focused on a law firm's or individual attorney's strengths.

Focusing on a particular aspect of your practice that you feel strongly about can't help differentiate you from other lawyers and lead to new business prospects, according to Jonathan Fitzgarrald, the chief marketing officer at Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP. He relayed the story of one attorney he helped several years ago.

Fitzgarrald said he quizzed the lawyer on what kind of practice he wanted to have. He responded that he wanted to be an entertainment lawyer. Wanting the attorney to differentiate himself further, Fitzgarrald asked him to be more specific, and he responded that he had a video game practice.

Using this bit of information, Fitzgarrald said he was able to get the attorney interviews in several publications. By aligning himself with the video game practice, the lawyer was able to market himself more effectively and get new work.

"You identify an expertise for marketing purposes — that's not definitive of everything you will do," Fitzgarrald said. "But that scares people half to death to focus on one area in particular."

Strive for Authenticity

Pop culture critic Chuck Klosterman has written extensively about the importance of authenticity in rock music, arguing in an essay that when country singer Garth Brooks released a rock album in 1999 as alter ego "Chris Gaines," it flopped because people knew his

rock career was inauthentic. Law firms can learn from Chris Gaines' mistakes: People know when someone is faking it.

When developing a brand, law firms should strive for authenticity, experts told Law360. To do that, attorneys should think back to why they got into the legal profession in the first place and find the firm's the core mission.

Fitzgarrald said a brand should represent a law firm's strengths without unnecessary enhancements or fabrications. A U.S. firm that has one office in Toronto shouldn't market itself as an international firm, he said.

"People can sense if people are trying to snowball them," Fitzgarrald said.

Greenberg Glusker developed its tagline, "the counsel you keep," after taking a look at the firm's culture of placing an emphasis on building relationships with clients and realizing that many of the firm's clients had been with Greenberg Glusker for several years, even decades, Fitzgarrald said.

"Our tagline was reflective of decades of representing the same person or same small business," Fitzgarrald said. "It's authentic to the firm."

Get on the Same Page

Once a firm has determined its message, it's critical that partners, associates and staff are all educated on the key tenants of the brand.

"Brands should never be construed as the sole providence of the marketing department," said Michael Scherpereel, director of branding and communications at Reed Smith LLP.

Carol Schiro Greenwald of CSG MarketingPartners, which provides business consulting services and training to law firms, said the most effective branding is easy to digest, so a firm can get everyone on board with the message. Everyone from name partners to receptionists should be knowledgeable about the brand.

"A brand is only as strong as its weakest link," she said.

Greenwald pointed to Proskauer Rose LLP's website as an example of effective branding. The front page of Proskauer's site cycles through a collection of three large slides with a few words of white bold text along with three core concepts: "inspire momentum," "drive momentum" and "sustain momentum."

"They never say they are a brand, but when you're finished looking at those pictures and those sentences, you have an idea about them," Greenwald said.

Build Relationships

Experts said building strong relationships with clients is an essential step of constructing a strong law firm brand. Good relationships are built over years of providing consistent and reliable service.

"You can never ignore the voice of your client," Scherpereel said. "You always have to be listening for what their needs are."

"It's about getting to know someone not just as a client, but as a person and about their lives away from the workplace," he added. "It's important that you learn what makes the other party tick."

And it's important for firms and attorneys to look beyond just building connections with individual clients.

Fitzgarrald said he recommends that firms build alliances with insurance, accounting and business management firms for potential referrals and assistance.

Promote, Promote, Promote

If a law firm wants to build a brand, it has to share it with people. Almost all law firms have a website, and most have blogs or client alerts they send out to keep their networks updated.

Other attorneys, meanwhile, prioritize speaking gigs and networking events, so they can meet with other lawyers or potential clients.

All of these different avenues can be effective, Fitzgarrald said, but the key to building a successful brand is to partake in a variety of activities. A diversified mix will ensure attorneys can reach new clients beyond just the audience for a law blog or a networking event.

"We all know lawyers who are smart and went to great schools, but what does it matter if nobody knows they exist?" Fitzgarrald said.

--Editing by Katherine Rautenberg and Philip Shea.

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