



how to market your law firm

PR for Law Firms

Public relations can help law firms attract new clients, position its practice groups and partners as thought leaders and experts in key target markets, increase brand recognition, and maintain/improve firm reputation. Earned media – an article written by your firm partners or written about your firm by a reporter – is far better than a full-page advertisement. If your firm wants to establish credibility, law firm PR is more likely than advertising to provide a solid return on investment.

The Benefits of PR for a Law Firm:

- It can attract high-profile cases by establishing the firm's credibility and record of success.
- It can help a law firm be selective in the cases it chooses to take on.
- It can protect from a firm's reputation if it loses a high-profile case or encounters other challenges inherent to the legal profession.
- It can help with recruitment and retention of top notch attorneys.

Questions a Law Firm Should Ask Before Launching PR:

- Will the firm's PR objectives HELP business goals?
- How will public relations initiatives be measured? What are your most critical benchmarks and milestones? Getting media coverage and writing press releases will not determine either of these goals. If your public relations firm is offering such measurement, get rid of them, or have a serious conversation with the firm.
- Why does the firm want PR at this particular juncture of their business objectives?
- Who is the target audience? Does the firm have several audiences?
- How does the firm wish to be perceived in its target market(s)?
- Is the PR strategy realistic?
- What PR tactics will deliver the greatest ROI for your firm?
- Can public relations goals be met within the allocated time frame?
- Do you want PR for practice groups or do you want PR help when working on a specific case?
- How long will the firm be committed to the PR initiatives?
- Which attorneys will regularly talk to the PR professionals to brainstorm ideas, etc.?
- How frequently will this be conducted?
- How comfortable are the attorneys talking with the press?
- Do the attorneys have a basic 101 understanding of how the press works?

Some Myths About PR for Law Firms:

- ***Publicity begins with a press release***

MYTH. Press releases, like any legal tactic in a lawyer's bag of tricks, have their place and time but seldomly and not always. According to Jim Schachter, *New York Times* Business Editor, "Sending a press release to the *New York Times* is like sending a satellite to Pluto. Press releases written by lawyers have all the appeal, news, and timeliness of white rice. We run 300 to 400 different legal stories every month, using a total of one to two press releases monthly as the tools to place those stories." Your firm should take note.

- ***Moving to new offices and hiring lateral partners are news***

MYTH. Look at the publications you want your firm to appear in. How often do they devote more than a paragraph to office or partner announcements? That doesn't mean that these events are not important or that news coverage of these events will not occur. It just means that news is more likely to be made if there is something of significance attached to it, such as a move into an historic building or a named partner or entire practice area moving from another firm.

- ***A merger is news***

MYTH. With the exception of historic mergers, law firm mergers are only one-day stories at best. Focusing your press efforts on the merger rather than the law firm is like Honda focusing all of its PR on only the first day of its new model year. PR has to be ongoing to be effective. Look to get some press from a merger, then give it value by getting press coverage of the partners, practice areas, and firms for the other 364 days of the year.

Potential PR Tactics for Law Firms:

Effective public relations campaigns require much more than issuing press releases. Other tactics will deliver much greater ROI.

- Offer firm partners as expert sources for news stories.
- Schedule partners to speak at relevant industry conferences that your target clients may attend (such as tax or estate planning conferences, commercial real estate conferences, etc.).
- Submit partner-written tip sheets and articles (not advertorials) for trade publications, bar newsletters, trade newsletters, local community papers, and Web sites on critical, timely topics such as "*Five Questions You Need to Ask Before You Embark on Estate Planning.*"
- Conduct community seminars or online webinars about critical topics. Invite reporters to attend.
- Sponsor local events.
- Make sure your law firm has an online media room. Having a press room will increase your chances of becoming a resource because reporters will have constant access to all of your firm's news releases, reports, photos, videos, and/or other resources.
- Collaborate on a research project for an industry publication.
- Post comments on business blogs or news web sites.
- Scan industry publication editorial calendars for stories relevant to your practice area expertise, and contact editors for stories that pertain to your firm's knowledge and experience.