

## LAW FIRM MARKETING

# The Industry-Specific Legal Expert

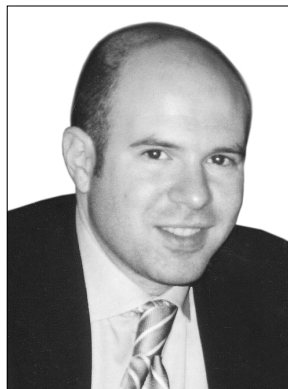
BY SPENCER Z. BARETZ

Attorneys can no longer afford to rely on their firms' goodwill to bring in business. This is the age of specialization where even the most established rainmakers at marquee firms must justify to prospective clients their experience in handling specific industry problems. More and more clients now seek legal counsel from attorneys who intimately understand their businesses, not just lawyers who can get the job done.

Yet, almost universally, law firms use generic, indistinguishable labels to identify their individual practice groups. While labels like "Corporate," "Litigation," "Antitrust" and "Tax" clearly identify broad areas of expertise, in reality, attorneys practicing within these groups often have robust niche practices targeted at specific industries. For instance, a labor and employment department at a large firm may have an especially large client base in the retail industry. Or a commercial litigation boutique may represent a number of different automotive manufacturers. Within each firm and each department, numerous lawyers have their own specialties. Yet few attorneys are capitalizing, from a marketing perspective,

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on their valuable industry niche experience.

Attorneys need to cast themselves apart from the competition by positioning themselves as experts in particular niche industries. Here's how to do it:

### Brand Marketing

Attorneys can learn a great deal from the marketing models employed by the mega-corporations they serve.

What does Proctor & Gamble market? Not itself. Not even its individual product categories (skin care, oral care and antiperspirants). Proctor & Gamble markets its individual brands (Gillette, Crest and Sure) to set its individual product lines apart from the competition. Law firms should take the lead from this successful marketing strategy and focus on marketing their "products"...their lawyers who have uniquely valuable skill sets.

How do you do that? By focusing on identifiable niche expertise directed at targeted industries.

Consider this: Martindale Hubbell lists 103 firms nationwide with an "energy" practice group and 566 "energy lawyers." Why should anyone hire your firm as opposed to one of the 103 other Proctor & Gambles? Because you have "Ethanol Attorneys" or a "Clean Coal Specialists," experts whose skill sets separate them from the other run of the mill energy attorneys. This is a compelling and powerful marketing strategy to distinguish yourself and/or your practice group.

While it is not an easy task to brand attorneys as uniquely

defined specialists, there are three basic activities any attorney can perform to develop a marketable, truly identifiable practice niche: speaking at industry conferences and events; writing articles for targeted trade journals; and actively pursuing a strategic media relations program.

The key to success in each of these practices is creating and presenting compelling content that will speak specifically to the particular industry's most important business trends and legal problems.

## **Speaking Engagements**

Securing speaking engagements at industry trade conferences is often the most effective way for an attorney to establish a reputation for industry expertise. These opportunities provide attorneys with a forum to communicate, face-to-face, with potential clients.

Speaking engagements are also the most difficult to secure because they are the most valuable. These events are organized specifically for industry executives and revolve around the most important issues of the day. To earn the opportunity to speak, attorneys who want to participate must have an intimate knowledge of the pressing industry issues and be able to convey that understanding intelligently to others. Being a good public speaker, however, is not enough to earn an audience. Typically, attorneys who are able to present current topics that contain a sense of urgency—a topic that has immediate consequences if it remains unaddressed—receive the most invitations and have the easiest time securing speaking slots.

Every industry has its so-called “rags,” the publications that cover the more gossipy, insider-type news. We have all skimmed over the “Comings & Goings” and “Big Deals” sections of these publications at one time or another. What many people forget to realize is that these publications cover the essential business news and trend stories, and are read by the most important industry players, who are the people most likely to seek out lawyers with specialties in that field. Whether it is Advertising Age, Hedge Fund Alert, or Private Equity Week, these types of publications are the most important target media to be in for an attorney trying to connect with potential clients within a specific industry.

Getting published in them is a different story, however. The challenge for an attorney is to create topics that will address specific and key industry problems, while at the same time conveying an intimate understanding of the legal solutions to them. The article should address day-to-day challenges that are immediately recognizable and resonate with people in the industry—be it exorbitant compensation packages for hedge fund managers or new FTC regulations that will limit advertising campaigns—and then explain how that job function can be affected by a pressing legal issue.

More to the point, attorneys who write articles in this manner demonstrate their understanding of the inner workings of an industry and the legal issues surrounding it. Potential clients who read these articles will, over time, view the author as a trustworthy source. When they need a lawyer, clients look to see which attorneys are authorities on the specific issue in question and will more often than not choose an attorney who is published over others who are not.

## **Media Relations**

Strategic media relations programs are the foundation for attorneys seeking a reputation for industry expertise. Such programs establish attorneys as trusted, familiar names, building a level of credibility for them within the industry, which is a critical first step for future and more elaborate marketing efforts.

There are two complimentary approaches lawyers should take to make media relations programs effective. First, attorneys must take a proactive approach to help develop the interesting and relevant stories that are pitched to journalists working at industry publications. The second is a more reactive approach, where attorneys should alert the media of their availability to be used as expert sources to give context or comment on stories the journalist might be writing on their own.

Effectiveness here requires repetition and consistency. The only way for attorneys to cast themselves as expert authorities in a given field is by participating often in, and contributing to, important stories that are being published. By doing so, attorneys can consistently remind the market of their specific expertise in the field.

## **Putting it All Together**

Niche marketing requires a concerted effort and the success of each element—speaking, writing and media relations—are all interdependent. The marketing process is difficult and takes time, but when attorneys market themselves effectively—targeting their niche audience with important and relevant information—the ground work will be laid and additional marketing opportunities will begin to present themselves.

There are hundreds of attorneys across the country who cover the same area of law. If attorneys want to attract new business, or keep the business they have from leaving, niche marketing is a compelling, useful marketing strategy to consider.