

## MARKETING THE PROFESSIONS

By Steven A. Meyerowitz

**W**E had perfected one art for the first 65 years of our existence — the art of anonymity."

Charles Kaiser, Jr. was speaking about Parnell Kerr Forster, the Houston-based accounting firm of which he is managing partner. But he could just as easily have been referring to lawyers, doctors or the accounting profession as a whole.

Professionals, who only a few years ago considered any form of aggressive advertising to be undignified and even, perhaps, unethical, are learning to market themselves. They are not only advertising, but sending out brochures and newsletters, holding seminars — adopting all the promotional staples that management consultants and other service firms use to hype their practices.

The amount of promotional material being generated is enormous. Michael Watras, president of Corporate Graphics Inc., a printing and design company in New York that specializes in corporate literature, says that until three years ago his company had never printed a brochure for a lawyer. Now, he

says, he has three print jobs going, has been asked for price quotes on three more, and is "getting an incredible number of calls seeking information" about brochures.

Greenfield/Belsler Inc., a Washington-based firm that prepares brochures for law firms, has seen its billings "double every year since we started four years ago," said Donna Greenfield, the company's president.

There may, in fact, be a bit of overkill going on. Friedman & Koven, a Chicago law firm, has started sending a labor law newsletter to existing and potential clients. "Probably a half-dozen other firms in the Chicago area were doing labor law newsletters" already, said Paul J. Cherner, a partner in the firm. "It used to be if you had a brochure describing your firm, it gave you a leg up," said Robert W. Denney, a marketing consultant in Wayne, Pa. "Now it's defensive marketing."

Although it is difficult to measure the efficacy of the marketing efforts, the professionals swear by them. Williams, Young & Associates, a Wisconsin accounting firm, has been spending about \$1,000 a month on a

marketing and publications program that includes a sizable number of bankers on the mailing list. The result, says Ruth Dumesic, director of communications for Williams, Young, is that the banking industry now accounts for 68 percent of total billings, up from just 38 percent two years ago.

Although most of the promotion is aimed at new clients, professionals are also seeking repeat business. And that has meant much greater attention to customer service.

Physicians, for example, "are looking at the courtesy of their staff, taking surveys of patients to see what they think of the office, and trying to determine whether their patients want morning hours, evening hours or Saturday hours," said Carol Dahl, coordinator of market development, a newly created post, at St. Joseph Hospital in Omaha.

"Lawyers used to think that they just had to get the job done," added Miss Greenfield. "Now, they know the client has to feel satisfied. They are aware that they risk losing their clients to another law firm."

# Brochures That Define a Special Niche

**P**ATIENTS walking into Dr. Kenneth Fox's office in Falls Church, Va., are handed more than just a medical history form to fill out. They are given a brochure that tells them about Dr. Fox, an ophthalmologist, and the other doctors in his group. "It tells them who we are and what we do," said Dr. Fox.

The brochure does double duty. It makes existing patients aware of services the doctors offer — for example, free transportation to hospitals for surgery. And it gives them something to hand friends who are looking for a doctor.

Brochures "facilitate referrals," said Jay McCrensky, president of Marketshare Inc., a Washington-based marketing consulting firm. "Patients will pass them on, saying, 'This is my doctor.'"

Lawyers and accountants have caught onto the same trick. Small firms that never had any printed brochures are ordering them now. And large firms that have only had general brochures in the past are printing new ones describing specific areas of their practices and sending them, often unsolicited, to existing and potential clients.

Brochures are not cheap. Public relations and marketing firms charge anywhere from \$30 to \$150 an hour to help prepare them. And printing and mailing costs can mount up. Williams, Young paid

\$20,000 just to print 2,500 copies of its full-color, eight-pager.

Such costs can keep single practitioners away. "A lot of doctors are calling about brochures and then deciding not to have them done when they find out that the cost could be \$5 to \$10 per copy," said Mr. Watras, the printer.

For large firms, though, the cost may be worth it, in that it enables them to paint themselves as broadly or narrowly as they wish. Brochures "position the firm in the market, tell what's unique about it," said Mr. Denney, the consultant. "They can say 'we're a small law firm that takes only personal injury matters' or 'we're a Wall Street firm that does only securities work.'"

By the same token, brochures can highlight a firm's breadth. Mr. McCrensky speaks of a law firm that offers "one brochure on the diversity of the firm, one on services for real estate developers and another on services for in-house counsel of Fortune 500 companies."

Similarly, Touche Ross & Company, the big accounting firm, has created a series of narrowly focused brochures — some to recruit, some to discuss particular areas of practice such as real estate appraisals, some to describe the firm's work in specific industries such as retailing, telecommunications, or health care. "They're built into a well-planned marketing program," said Carole Congram, director of marketing communication planning.

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