

Publication Programs

Plan for Articles, Newsletters and Brochures

The beginning of the year is a wonderful time for small and medium size law firms to finalize a client development plan. Three key parts are:

- newsletters, alerts, white papers, and memoranda and bulletins to clients;
- bylined articles by firm lawyers on substantive law topics; and
- brochures, practice descriptions, Web content, and the like.

Firm Newsletters

A regular firm newsletter that focuses on a specific area of law demonstrating a firm's substantive knowledge and capabilities, and that is distributed to an appropriate group of actual and potential clients and referral sources, can become the cornerstone of a firm's efforts to attract new clients and regularly communicate with others.

The newsletter should be eight to twelve printed pages in length; a shorter newsletter will appear too lightweight. Except in special circumstances (e.g., a new development that a firm wants to discuss in detail that requires extra pages), the added benefits of a newsletter that is longer than a dozen pages probably do not exceed the additional costs.

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A firm should produce the newsletter four to six times per year. From the readers' point of view, a newsletter that comes out fewer than four times per year does not seem to be something they can

their business or that can make it clear to them that the firm can help them if they retain it.

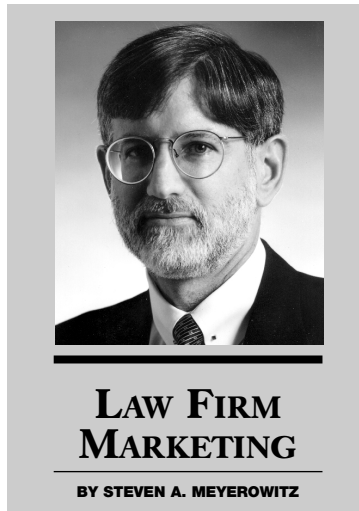
Getting Started

Once a firm makes decisions as to the length and frequency of the newsletter, it needs to determine who will receive it, what it will look like and how each issue will be prepared and mailed.

It is important to make certain that the lawyers at the firm contribute to the firm's mailing list, and that those names and addresses are contained in an appropriate database.

To some extent, the form of the newsletter can be developed only after the firm knows the general categories of articles that each issue of the newsletter will have. Generally speaking, though:

- the newsletter should have short articles rather than long articles;
- articles might contain "bylines" of partners to reflect the personal nature of a firm's services;
- the newsletter should use examples frequently in articles;
- the newsletter could be designed using appropriate typefaces, white space, and "screens" that the printer could apply and therefore no "artwork" may be needed;
- it might be appropriate to consider using photos of the firm's partners to accompany their articles rather than using historical or stock photos, which is a difficult thing to do well; and



rely on. At the least, it fails to keep the firm's name before readers on a regular basis. As with a newsletter that is more than twelve pages long, the benefits to a firm of a newsletter that is published more than six times per year are probably not outweighed by the extra costs. (Newsletters that are published 11 or 12 times or more per year typically are those that charge a subscription fee.)

From a content perspective, a newsletter must emphasize substantive developments and must contain substantive analysis of legal matters. Clients do not want to read only news about the firm that is producing the newsletter; they want to read about things that can help them in

- firms also must consider the kind and quality of paper and colors of ink to use, decisions that will be based at least in part on printing estimates.

Each issue of a newsletter requires the following steps:

- researching appropriate topics;
- obtaining appropriate background materials;
- preparing and reviewing a draft of the newsletter;
- incorporating comments, if any, into the draft;
- “typesetting” or “desktop publishing” the newsletter; and
- having the printer print the newsletter and either stuff them in envelopes and mail them, or send them back to the firm to finalize those steps.

Bylined Articles

Bylined articles by a lawyer can serve as a valuable tool to obtain new clients and referrals. A trade publication, newspaper, or general interest magazine that publishes an article by a partner at a firm is implicitly endorsing the professional qualifications of that partner. There also are other benefits of publishing articles as part of a coordinated publications program: the firm can make mention of all published articles in a firm newsletter, distribute reprints of published articles to people on its mailing list, and use the topic of a published article as the basis for a shorter article in a firm newsletter.

For the most part, lawyers should not begin to write any article until an editor has expressed interest in seeing it. In other words, firms should try to “place” most articles in advance. There are numerous publications addressed to or

read by the kinds of clients that firms want to attract that would be interested in articles by law firms. These range from various state and national law journals to general interest newspapers.

To begin an article writing program, firms should set a goal of the number of articles they would like to have published over the course of a year by their lawyers. An occasional article standing alone is probably not worth the effort, although one or two articles a year that are tied in with a regular newsletter could be effective.

Once a firm has settled on the number of articles, it has to develop appropriate topics and contact appropriate editors. For each article, it then needs to obtain relevant background materials (e.g., court decisions or legislative and regulatory materials), prepare a draft, finalize the article, submit it to the editor, and work with the editor to publication.

Other Media

- **Client Memoranda.** The process for preparing memoranda or bulletins for clients is much the same as article and newsletter writing. First, the firm has to come up with a timely topic that is of interest to clients or prospective clients and that will highlight an area of the firm’s practice that it wants to promote. Then, it needs to assemble and review related background materials and prepare and finalize a draft.

Memoranda to clients can be effective, but firms have to make certain that they send them out regularly. One-page memoranda to clients should be distributed more frequently than four times per year; indeed, a firm might want to distribute at least 8 to 10 of them over the course of a year.

- **Web Site/Firm Brochure.** Content

for a firm Web site and for a firm brochure can overlap, and perhaps be identical. If a firm does not have it already, it should consider having text that introduces the firm, explains in detail its various practice areas, and standardizes the lawyer biographies.

To prepare this text, one person should be designated to interview the firm’s partners and review any written materials that have been previously prepared that describe the firm (e.g., pitch letters or responses to requests for proposal).

Many law firms now have pre-printed brochures or firm resumes that firms can print out on their own computers when needed, and update as required. Thus, it may not be necessary for a firm to develop a pre-printed brochure. Instead, a firm may want to begin work on a firm resume that describes its practice and experience and that provides examples of actual work (if not client names) with which the firm has been involved.

- **Public Speaking and Ads.** There also are other client development tools that a firm might want to consider including as part of its publications program. For example, it may be worthwhile to have a press backgrounder about the firm’s practice groups (or about the firm as a whole). There also may be one or two (or more) opportunities during the year for press releases and similar efforts.

In addition, speaking opportunities at seminars and conferences for prospective clients and advertising may be valuable as part of a client development program.

The most important step in the whole process is the first step, however: coming up with the plan. That step is one that firms should take early in this calendar year.