

MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

A marketing director takes charge

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BY STEVEN A. MEYEROWITZ

When the Boston law firm of Palmer & Dodge hired Laura D. Woolpert as its director of marketing and communications in December 1985, its marketing efforts had been "undirected and unfocused," admits real estate specialist James B. White, a member of the 135-lawyer firm's marketing committee and its immediate past chairman.

Hiring Woolpert gave the firm an in-house resource, someone to back up and coordinate marketing efforts. Two years later, the firm has gained new clients in each of its 10 departments, with notable growth in its international, high tech and real estate practice groups. In the process, marketing has become an inextricable part of the firm's culture and Woolpert has become expert in the art of getting things done without making waves.

"The first marketing goals we formulated were modest and realistic," says Woolpert, whose background includes 10 years' experience in advertising and corporate public relations. "We didn't aim to raise business by a certain percentage, but rather to attract certain types of clients."

One of the first things she did after coming to the firm was to meet with each of its 53 partners. She also prepared a detailed budget and marketing plan for 1986.

The marketing plan was designed to "establish a basic marketing framework," says Woolpert. This meant generating written materials—resumes for individuals, press releases, recruiting materials, firm-wide brochures and brochures for specific departments, newsletters and in-house communications.

As time went on, strategies were developed for particular departments. The firm had a reputation, ac-



James White and Laura Woolpert with some Palmer & Dodge brochures.

ording to Woolpert, as "an outstanding bond firm," but other departments were not as well-known. So, two projects included boosting the visibility of the real estate department and better cross-selling of the tax department.

Initially, she faced a fair amount of resistance to her position. "When I came in, 15 percent of the firm were strong believers in marketing and were supportive," she says. The rest were opposed or indifferent.

She met some resistance head-on when she and White decided to have the firm's recruiting brochure revised. They wanted to be involved in the project because, she says, "hiring is the supreme marketing effort."

The brochure the firm had been using was delivering "the wrong message of a 100-year-old, stodgy firm, not one with a dynamic high-tech practice," says Woolpert. The idea was to rewrite and redesign the brochure so that it was in sync with the firm's desired image. But Woolpert's efforts were blocked by a split

between the hiring and the marketing committees on the tone and appearance of the brochure.

The stalemate was broken only after the managing partner intervened and sided with Woolpert and White. Differences also were worked out in meetings between the two committees, in which, says Woolpert, "we were able to negotiate a common ground."

The four-color, 16-page brochure took six months to produce, which Woolpert thinks is quite fast. "It normally takes a year to produce a major promotional piece of that caliber."

Woolpert also managed to make a convert out of one skeptic after he spoke at a seminar the firm co-sponsored on the Tax Reform Act. The partner attended a reception that followed the seminar. Seeing the clients' response firsthand was what made him a believer, says Woolpert.

Overcoming initial resistance was easy compared to navigating firm politics, says Woolpert. These problems crop up in several ways.

Steven A. Meyerowitz, a lawyer, is a free-lance writer living in New York. Edward J. Burke, the Journal's regular Marketing writer, will be back next month.

White initially "acted as a buffer," absorbing the brunt of criticism, Woolpert says. For example, when one partner complained about the content of the firm's brochure, White defended it by saying "the piece had to be timely, and we took the facts we had and we made the best decision." Partners now contact Woolpert directly, which she terms "a quantum leap."

Politics also enter in when she works for a particular group within the firm. "Others feel slighted," she notes. The antidote is having a marketing plan in place and approved by the marketing committee. It is the yardstick against which all marketing efforts are measured, she says.

"If someone says he wants to do a huge public relations project, I can

say that it doesn't fit within the plan or budget and I will suggest something else."

White is enthusiastic about the firm's acceptance of marketing. It has taken a lot of work on Woolpert's part—she now has a three-person staff—but that alone wouldn't have been enough. The key, says Woolpert, was having the support of White, the marketing committee and, to a lesser extent, the management committee—and "maintaining a sense of humor."

Brochure News. The tales and travails of the do-it-yourself brochure are related by George Vetter of Rhode Island's Vetter and White in the fall 1987 issue of *The Compleat Lawyer*, the magazine of the ABA's General Practice Section. Vetter's

brochure, which he did in-house with a freelance graphic designer, sparked comment because it featured a photo of two buxom women cavorting in a bathtub. The caption: "Like a bathtub, trial lawyers have to fill up on the facts and the law of a case. And they retain what they learned. This is why trial lawyers become so versatile."

Vetter explains: "We wanted a brochure with a panache and a dash of wit, something to set us apart."

The issue also features articles on client retention, marketing plans and the ABA Advertising Commission. Copies are available for \$5.00 plus postage and handling from Order Fulfillment, American Bar Association, 750 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60611; (312) 988-5555. ■

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