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The Need for Follow-Through in Marketing

By Steven A. Meyerowitz

Could Willie Mays have hit 660 home runs if he had routinely checked his swing? Would Columbo be Columbo without "uh, ma'am, could I ask you just one more thing?" What if there were no such thing as a "reply brief"?

The point here is that what often separates success from failure is the follow-through. It is that last bit of effort that may help a ballplayer, detective or lawyer stand out from the crowd.

It is not just necessary and effective in sports, television and litigation. For law firms, follow-through is as important to marketing and new client development as a practice area's marketing plan or a lawyer's published articles.

Without sufficient follow-through, a law firm can waste a great deal of effort and marketing dollars. Poor follow-through can undermine a practice development program.

Status Checks

Virtually every marketing step that a firm takes requires or can benefit from

follow-through. For instance, a lawyer who submits an article to an editor of a magazine or newspaper should not just assume that the editor received it. Nor should a lawyer simply rely on a Federal Express computer check indicating that someone signed for it.

The article must reach the correct editor's hands. To ensure that, the lawyer should follow up with a quick phone call to the editor, make sure the article was received and tell the editor the lawyer is eager to know if it is going to be published.

Few, if any, articles (other than regular columns) are ever published without the author being contacted by the editor. Accordingly, if the lawyer does not hear from the editor within a few weeks, it is not likely to be because the article is "in publication." More likely, the editor has turned to other things, has not yet made a decision or has decided to reject the article.

The lawyer should follow up again and ask for a decision. Lawyers should not worry about seeming too eager or

being too bothersome. No editor has ever rejected a good article because a prospective author politely inquired as to its status.

By the same token, if the editor sends the lawyer edited galleys or page proofs to review, the lawyer should do so promptly (and should request only those changes necessitated by typos or developments in the law; stylistic changes at this point should be avoided at all costs). The minimal follow-through required can yield great results — a published article.

Mailing Lists

Suppose that a law firm regularly distributes a newsletter to clients, contacts, friends of the firm and others on its mailing list. For each issue, the firm oversees the preparation of the text, has the newsletter duplicated and brings the printed copies back to the firm so that its support staff can stuff the copies in envelopes and affix mailing labels. Thus, the firm will be completely satisfied with the product before it goes out.