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LEGAL MARKETING

Innovations in Law Firm Marketing:

Which Firms Are Doing Cool Things That Work?

BY STACY WEST CLARK

Special to the Legal

Each year at holiday time, I like to give the legal community a present. In years past, it has been top tips from leading marketing consultants around the country. This year, I decided to do something different.

Earlier this month, I sent out a “call” on LinkedIn, on various law marketing listservs and at programs I was speaking at for anyone to tell me what they were doing that was “outside the box” in law firm marketing.

“Out with brochures, seminars, newsletters and e-alerts,” I advised — I wanted to spread the news of firms that were really doing something different. Firms from around the United States — and even Poland — wrote to tell me about their new marketing initiatives. So without further adieu, here is some news from the front.

THIRSTY THURSDAYS

Linda Jackson, director of client relations for a 240-lawyer Kentucky-based firm, Stites & Harbison, described to me her firm’s new late afternoon networking and programmatic events series. Called “Thirsty Thursdays,” the early programs were composed of 15 people — five attorneys from the firm and 10 guests.

In a short time, that effort has now expanded to four of the firm’s five offices, with 40-60 attendees. The events are held monthly in one city and quarterly in the others. Clients and lawyers eat, have some “libation,” hear a 35-minute presentation from an attorney and then the networking goes full throttle ahead.



STACY WEST

CLARK has been helping Pennsylvania lawyers and law firms expand their practices for more than 25 years. She is a former attorney with Morgan Lewis & Bockius and was the firm’s first marketing director. She is president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC (www.stacyclarkmarketing.com), a firm that helps law firms grow their businesses.

Jackson reports that work from new clients and additional work from current clients have come in as a result of these events. She added the events are “easy to plan and all have a good time getting to know each other better face-to-face.”

KILL THE CORPORATE BROCHURES

Beata Niemczuk of Poland’s Wardynski & Partners (135 lawyers) explained that her firm, one of the largest in Poland, decided to “kill the corporate brochures” as they felt clients had enough of legal jargon and found them to be of no use. Instead, the firm created an amazingly professional “yearbook” for its clients containing an interesting array of articles of interest to both lawyers and nonlawyers. It is translated into Polish and English and is available on its website at www.wardynski.com.pl/en/publications/yearbook-2011.

According to Niemczuk: “When clients received their copy, they would ask for additional ones to distribute within their organizations.” A good sign, she added: “We

printed 1,000 hard copies and as of this writing, they are all gone.”

DOING IT DIFFERENTLY ON FACEBOOK

Susanne Mandel, chief marketing and business development officer of Orlando, Fla.’s Lowndes Drosdick Doster Kantor & Reed (115 lawyers), reports that her firm, recently honored by the Legal Marketing Association for its 2011 social media initiatives, approached its Facebook page in a different way.

As she explains, many lawyers in her firm questioned the necessity and usefulness of this medium. The marketing team decided to create a firm-branded Facebook account dedicated to the community and highlighting the hundreds of organizations that the firm supports both financially and with leadership and volunteer time.

“Focusing on our community efforts allayed many of the fears our lawyers had of forging into Facebook. As a result, each of our social media vehicles — Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs — are firm-branded but separately defined, each with an appropriate purpose and all intertwined to promote many aspects of our firm.”

Check out the page at www.facebook.com/lowndes.law.

BRINGING IN THE BIG GUNS

At 1,600-lawyer Reed Smith (confession, my husband is a partner there), Jennifer Smuts, senior manager of business development, said, “By continually engaging clients to learn about the proverbial stones in their shoes,” the firm decided to create a value-added program for corporate clients.

Titled “Reed Smith General Counsel Initiative,” the firm hired former GCs from blue-chip companies in the financial services and life science industries who possessed an outstanding record of results in “bet-the-institution” situations. As Smuts explained, “This unique panel of highly skilled former general counsel within Reed Smith are available to consult clients for free and give them the benefit of their experience.” From what I understand, clients are seeing this service as a huge plus.

TRAINING THAT GETS LAWYERS SOMEWHERE

No innovative or outside-the-box marketing would be possible if attorneys did not grasp marketing fundamentals. In 2011, Gibbons P.C. (230 lawyers in New York and New Jersey) launched the Gibbons Leadership Academy, a curriculum of training programs customized to every stage of an attorney’s career.

The “Law Firms 101” program, for example, includes quarterly sessions for new associates, with topics that include building credibility and respect; “working a room”; creating a 30-second elevator pitch; managing time and expectations; and developing important client service skills.

The programs for more senior associates and a select group of new directors are more intensive and in-depth, focusing on the development of a personal brand, trusting client relationships, both short-term and career goals, and persuasive, convincing solutions.

Patrick C. Dunican Jr., chairman and managing director of the firm, said, “Gibbons Leadership Academy not only provides our attorneys with the skills needed to advance their careers, it also helps us secure a next generation of dynamic firm leaders, and, most importantly, continue to provide stellar client service.”

For example, Sean P. Mahoney, a senior associate in the firm’s Philadelphia office, focused his first goal-setting session on aligning his practice more closely with targeted clients by researching their backgrounds, operations, decision-makers and recent transactions and litigation in order to publish articles germane to their specific needs and strengthen his practice in ways to solve problems for them. As a result, he

noted, “I am becoming fluent enough in our clients’ businesses and operations such that I am comfortable asking for in-person meetings to offer our targeted legal services to solve their specific problems.”

GETTING SOCIAL MEDIA UP AND RUNNING FAST

While lots of firms are dipping their toes into social media, Philadelphia’s Obermayer Rebmann Maxwell & Hippel (115 attorneys), one of the city’s oldest law firms, had not done anything on this front at all. They decided to change that — both in a quick and a strategic way.

The firm hired Marketing Director Sharen Nocella four months ago and today it has strategically embraced social media as a way to increase awareness about the firm.

As Nocella explained: “Our first goal was to get all the attorneys to have a good LinkedIn profile. Then we worked on Facebook and Twitter. Now we are

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posting practically daily. Our tweets feed into our attorneys’ LinkedIn profiles. This has increased our visibility. According to a Google Analytics report, after one month of launching our LinkedIn effort, LinkedIn is now our number one referring website to our firm’s home website — surpassing Martindale.”

The firm expects to launch an e-mail campaign to further increase the number of followers they have on social media.

WHAT HAVE CLIENTS APPLAUDED FOR?

My friend Marcie Shunk, a principal at the top-rated BTI Consulting Group of

Wellesley, Mass., who speaks on a daily basis with corporate counsel, provided me with some examples of what law firms were doing that clients were raving about. Here is what she said:

- Seyfarth Shaw’s adoption of a Lean Six Sigma process improvement program, which is redefining the law firm’s value equation.

- Bryan Cave’s program of really “listening to clients” as evidenced by their growing client feedback and client team programs.

- Hunton & Williams’ “best of the best” help in advising clients on business issues in a holistic, client-centric approach.

HOLIDAY FUN

You will see why I put this one last. In an effort to combat the stress of the holidays, the Illinois personal injury firm Tor Hoerman Law offers up to friends of the firm some “free fun” this holiday season.

Instead of sending out the standard lawyer holiday card, the firm sent out a replica of a movie poster with a link to a spoof of an episode of “The Office” starring the lawyers and employees of the firm.

According to Jessie Hoerman, marketing director of Tor Hoerman Law, “The people in our office have a really great sense of humor. Why hide that? We could just send out a holiday card, but, we really thought friends of the firm would enjoy this more. And, even if they don’t get it, we really had a great time filming it. The reactions to the holiday card and movie have been as much fun as the filming.”

Some friends of the firm have requested signed movie posters, and the video has introduced new visitors to the website, which has also gotten positive reviews. The 15 minute video can be seen at www.torhoermanlaw.com/awards.

Thank you to all the firms who shared their innovative stories. Best wishes to all for a wonderful 2012. •