

Red-hot branding

Activities that can help to maximise the long-term success of your branding initiatives.
Compiled by STACY WEST CLARK

Refer to clients and employees

At the outset of any project, ask your clients and employees what they think your brand is. Also ask your partners' spouses, retired partners, vendors and staff, 'What words come to mind when you think of us?' and 'What are our strengths?'. Find out 'What do we have that our competitors do not?'.
If you try to build a brand that differs largely from this consensus, you're in for a long, expensive haul.

Educate lawyers and staff

Before you begin the branding process, meet with the lawyers and staff and explain to them what it is all about. Remind them that branding is the means by which your firm is differentiated from the sea of competitors out there – it enables clients and prospects to understand the personality, ability and character of your firm. Inform them about the entire process and what their role will be in enforcing the brand once it is in place. If your lawyers and staff understand and are involved in the process, they will be empowered and effective brand representatives in the long term.

Be honest

Your brand should be an honest reflection of your firm's personality, strengths and character. It should not be something an agency conceived that has no basis in the reality of the firm. As Andy Havens, president of Sanestorm Marketing, says: "If you have an agency independently coming up with a brand for you without first really getting your

firm, the brand will have no real lasting meaning. If it's just a cute phrase, a logo, a colour scheme and some marketing swag... that's not a brand. Branding is about meaningful communication, and, at its root, that should be about who you are, what you do, what you aspire to do, what you don't do, and where you are going."

Launch it effectively

Simultaneously announce your brand to clients and the public in a memorable way. Some firms send postcards or e-alerts, while others announce the new brand with sweets or gifts. I encourage my law-firm clients to do something memorable, but in keeping with the firm's practice.

The brand goes on everything

For the brand to work, it has to be out there – literally on every piece of paper or product the firm generates, with the exception of legal documents. The brand logo and tagline should appear on every advert, seminar handout cover, on your website, in recruiting brochures and every place the public is likely to see your firm name. Enforce the brand religiously. Have a standards book and share it with your staff and outside printers. Use the same colours on everything – always be consistent.

Constantly promote the brand internally

Make the brand promise visible to your employees at all times. This could include placing posters that have been customised with the brand promise around the office.

Use it or lose it

You must keep the brand in front of people for it to do its job and continue promoting your message. Every six months or so, re-market your brand out to your target audiences of clients, prospects and referral sources. Keep investing in it.

'Be the ball'

A brand is not just a tagline – it is the attitude, style and personality of the firm. Your people have to embody the brand and 'live' it. The firm's human-resources policies, staff and lawyer-orientation programmes, technology support, receptionists – in fact, the entire business operation – should reflect the brand. According to Clara Boza, former chief marketing officer at international firm Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham LLP and winner of a US award for her branding efforts at the firm, "Every interaction someone has with the firm is the brand. Success is determined by whether the people who come into contact with your firm experience the essence of the brand promise."

So, if your brand is 'Fastest service in the land', make sure your phones are answered before the second ring and that your lawyers get back to clients within a day. Otherwise, your brand and your firm will be viewed as 'just talk'. ■



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