

# The Legal Intelligencer

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## Lessons From Small Firm Marketing Valuable for Firms of Every Size

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Marketing is critical for law firms of any size. That was the conclusion of legal marketing experts who convened on Jan. 20 for the Legal Marketing Association Metropolitan Philadelphia Chapter's event titled "Small Law Firm Marketing: A Panel Discussion." Although the program focused on issues relating to firms of fewer than 100 attorneys, including managing multiple requests with minimal resources and examining the differences and similarities in small law firms, it also provided practical marketing tips that firms of any size can implement.

The panel of experts was moderated by the chapter's former president, Jamie Mulholland of Jamie Mulholland Marketing, and included as panelists Stacy Clark, president of Stacy Clark Marketing LLC; Ritchenya Dodd, business development and marketing director of Hill Wallack; Joel Feldman, managing partner of Anapol Schwartz Weiss Cohan Feldman & Smalley; Julie Hayes, marketing manager of Manko Gold Katcher & Fox; Stacey Kracher, marketing director of Zarwin Baum DeVito Kaplan Schaer Toddy; Jessica Sharp, principal of Maven Communications; and Mary Zove, executive director of Fineman Krekstein & Harris.

### Marketing Budgets

Much of the discussion focused on marketing budgets, with panelists sharing details of their method of tracking expenditures so as to stay within their budgets. All of the firms represented on the panel said they had some sort of marketing budget. Although some marketing budgets were more sophisticated than others, it is evident that, to some degree, firms are tracking their marketing and business development efforts and expenses.

Zove heads all the administrative functions at Fineman Krekstein and also serves as its marketing liaison. In this role, she uses her financial background to determine and itemize a firmwide marketing budget, and she works with the attorneys to stay within the budget throughout the year.

At Hill Wallack, Dodd said she just finished implementing a zero-based marketing budget, a first for the firm. Zero-based budgeting starts from a "zero base" where every line item within the department is analyzed to determine its need, priority and cost. This type of strategy helps to justify all budget requests and therefore prioritizes marketing activities. Although this endeavor was a challenge, especially in the way that her attorneys approached their marketing budgets, Dodd said the benefits far outweigh any disadvantages. Interestingly, almost half of the panel admitted that should the right opportunity present itself, they would be willing to go over projected marketing budgets this year.

### Marketing Plans

The panel was divided with regard to marketing plans. Some firms supported individual, firmwide, practice-specific or associate-specific marketing plans. Some firms encourage individual attorney marketing plans and individual marketing budgets. Maven Communications' Sharp said one of her clients has devoted significant resources toward educating associates within the firm about the importance of having and implementing marketing plans, and has even added this component to the associates' annual reviews.

The panel concluded that there is no right or wrong way to implement a marketing plan, just so long as a firm has one and uses it.

## Newsletters

Whether electronic or printed, almost all of the firms represented on the panel produce an in-house newsletter. At Anapol Schwartz, the firm newsletter is geared toward Feldman's business referral sources, 70 percent of which are other attorneys in the region. Mulholland explained that knowing your audience is critical to both a successful newsletter and to mastering business development efforts.

The newsletters at Manko Gold, both electronic and hard copy, are a communication device that alert its target audience to changing laws and current trends. Hayes, the firm's marketing manager, explained that the firm will take a 200-page opinion and provide an analysis of its implications in less than two pages, in order to provide value to their readers.

## Event Planning

At one point or another, every law firm marketer is tasked with planning an event. Whether big or small, in general, firm events are a significant investment of time and financial resources, but more importantly, they can prove to be enormously rewarding.

Kracher explained that hosting events throughout the year is a significant part of the marketing strategy at Zarwin Baum. The firm will host many legal seminars throughout the year that target the firm's clientele and address their business concerns. Zarwin Baum is so dedicated to these events that it invested in an onsite facility that can hold up to 300 people for any given event, Kracher said.

## Public Relations

Every successful marketing plan must include a plan for public relations, including both daily PR management and crisis management situations. Maven Communications' Sharp, who works with several law firm clients, helps them make sure that their PR plans include their placement on panels and other speaking opportunities available at trade organization conferences. Her firm encourages lawyers to step outside of their comfort zones.

If you send a real estate attorney to an environmental law conference and put them on a panel of experts, they automatically differentiate themselves as a minority participant. This provides him or her with an opportunity to showcase legal expertise. Sharp also encouraged the audience to pitch article placements to nonlegal trade organizations that often seek legal advice.

## Outsourcing

The answers varied considerably when the panelists were asked about which services they typically outsource. Zove explained that when Fineman Krekstein redesigned its website, she outsourced several components of the project, including the rewrite of her attorney's biographies, the design and data migration. She stated that when you are a small firm with minimal in-house resources, you become dependent on business partners to assist you with your projects. Somewhere along the way, you become one cohesive team.

Not so surprisingly, the majority of the panelists explained that the design of their websites was outsourced, but maintaining the content of the website was their firms' daily responsibility.

## Client Service

Clark, a legal marketer who works with several small law firm clients, emphasized the importance of "client service" to all law firms. Historically, client surveys have been just one way of extracting feedback from clients. More recently, Clark is working with her clients to better understand the "experience" from their clients' perspective.

In doing so, she said, she is able to better understand and articulate the differentiating factors that distinguish her clients' firms from their competition. Her research continuously points to the "service" aspect as the most unique differentiating factor for all firms.

This event was sponsored by Herrmann Advertising Design/Communications. •

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