

# Practice What You Preach: Professional Development for Legal Marketers



by Nancy L. Hoffman

**As a member of your firm's marketing department,** as a legal marketing professional with industry-specific experience and, most importantly, as a member of the Legal Marketing Association, it is time for you to step up to the plate and practice all that you preach to your attorneys on a daily basis. In order to succeed in this complicated industry, to be victorious in your career and all the while seek a bright future, there is no better time than the present to establish yourself as an expert. A legal marketing expert, that is.

In the legal marketing industry, establishing your attorneys as industry-specific specialists is one of your largest responsibilities. For example, when clients have a high-profile litigation matter, it is your job to be sure that they pick up the phone and call your attorney. In case your human resources manager neglected to mention it when you were hired, let me be the first to tell you: Part of your job description includes being part miracle worker and part mind reader.

As an aside, note that in some U.S. states, bar rules forbid using the words "expert," "expertise," "specialist," "specializes" and the like when marketing attorneys. Nonetheless, it is still your job to establish your attorneys as experts. Just use different words, such as "skilled," "focuses," "concentrates," "recognized" and "experienced."

You have invested both time and budget dollars to establish your attorneys as credible resources in their industry. Now, you must flip the switches and establish yourself as an expert when it comes to legal marketing. You know how to do this because you are *already* doing it.

## Pick Your Practice Area

First, you must determine an area of interest or a "practice area" within the legal marketing realm. What is your passion? Is it public relations, branding, advertising, design, business development, communications? Are you technology-driven? What parts of your job are the ones you look forward to most?

Next, you must prove yourself to be an expert in that particular practice area—taking this step requires a great deal of time and serious dedication. Fortunately, you can use your lawyer-friendly tips and apply them to your own career, using all the resources that are available to you.

First and foremost, you should build 30 minutes into your schedule each week and begin to research your practice

area in great depth. The LMA Web site offers articles, reports, listserv entries and other helpful tools within the resource center. Research posts on the listserv and articles related to this practice area in order to be "in the know" for all related topics. Absorb everything you can. Begin to take your own notes and formulate your own ideas relative to this topic. Most importantly, keep these notes easily accessible, so that you can continuously add content as you acquire additional information.

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Visit the American Marketing Association's Web site and learn everything you can about your practice area from the perspective of different industries. By reading through the materials of other industries relative to your practice area, you will become familiar with additional ways to tackle similar issues as they pertain to your job.

Keep current on all industry-related news items specific to your practice area. Become familiar with cutting-edge tactics, technologies and other theories. Stay on top of the changes that relate specifically to your practice area, while simultaneously preparing yourself to serve as an authority should the opportunity arise for local media attention relative to this topic.

After you have done your homework and thoroughly researched the practice area that you choose to become an expert in, begin to develop thoughts and theories and practice them where you work. As successes surface—and they will—write them down in *detail* in your notes. Draw conclusions and outline theories that arise as a result.

Seek out opportunities to publish your findings in trade publications in order to establish additional credibility. There are publications in the legal industry that feature marketing-related articles throughout the year, including several published by Incisive Media. Your local LMA chapter likely publishes an electronic newsletter that targets other legal marketers in your region, and you could pitch articles there. Similarly, the Association of Legal Administrators has both local and national electronic publications that offer legal marketers the opportunity to publish an informative article.

While writing for any of these publications takes time and

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## The Best Time to Advertise: Opportunities in a Down Economy

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dictable royalty-free stock photos; no more bland images of businessmen on BlackBerries. Stretch your creative approach so that the reader actually pauses to look at your ads. The more provocative and compelling the visual approach and call-to-action, the better chance you have of an audience remembering your message.

A recent survey by “BtoB Magazine” found that 31 percent of marketers surveyed planned to increase their advertising budget, and that “despite the down economy, 60.2 percent of marketers plan to launch new ad cam-

paigns in 2009.” Any number of past studies have consistently shown that companies that increase their marketing during a downturn tend to benefit in the long-run. And why not? Clients clearly feel more comfortable with firms that have a consistent brand presence. By creating or maintaining some level of advertising, you’ll be giving your firm the momentum it needs to get through these down times, and putting it in good position for the inevitable rebound.

And the economy will rebound. We may not know exactly when, but it will. So be ahead of the game. The best time to advertise is always right now. ■

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dedication, it also requires you to demonstrate creative differentiation because you must appeal to various audiences. Those in the legal marketing industry vary greatly, from vendors to law firm administrators to legal marketers and attorneys. It is imperative that you keep in mind your audience while you write.

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As your research findings take form, be sure to simultaneously search for any opportunities to speak about your practice area when appropriate. Stay in continuous communication and contact with other legal marketing professionals, both locally and nationally. This will not only help you keep ahead of the curve in your practice area by

learning about cutting-edge information, it will allow you to be one of the first to hear about public speaking opportunities as they become available.

The learning curve is far more difficult when we challenge ourselves rather than those who surround us. It is important to realize that demonstrating expertise in any given area is, in and of itself, a challenge. The knowledge that you acquire during these exercises will undoubtedly assist you in your professional development within the legal marketing industry.

These are just a few techniques for you to implement in your own career development and showcase your legal marketing knowledge. The individuals in our industry are constantly changing the face of the profession and taking it to new heights. You already know what to do and you already possess the tools to make it happen—because you are already doing it for the attorneys that you serve. Practice what you preach, and become an expert in the practice area that appeals to you most. ■

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## President’s Podium

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Did the Webinar you attended spark an idea for marketing a new practice? Did the social networking lunch program practically demonstrate how electronic tools are being harnessed for business development? Were you able to add value to an existing marketing initiative by participating in

a “best practices” discussion among LMA colleagues on the listserv? If so, make sure you take all of this into consideration as you evaluate what resources you need to remain successful and what provides the biggest return on investment.

Yes, membership in LMA is a line-item expense in your budget, and one that may be reviewed with a critical eye. But the value that your membership delivers to you and your firm far outweighs the investment. ■

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