

# LAWYERS JOURNAL

L A W P R A C T I C E M A N A G E M E N T

## Public relations and law firms: Does a media mention hold the same weight it once did?

By Marissa Luznar

It's true, gone are the days of beginning each morning with a cup of coffee while reading the local newspaper. The media landscape has evolved, and the world has embraced a 24/7 news-cycle. Despite these changes, one thing remains true – there is still power in a well-crafted public relations campaign.

Prospective clients hire attorneys they trust and see as credible, and a strategic PR campaign is an organic way to build that much-desired credibility. Purchasing ads or sponsored content (paid media) and sharing your firm's latest news via your e-newsletter (owned media) are both important to any successful marketing campaign, but by achieving third-party validation through media mentions and client testimonials (earned media) you're better positioned to gain the confidence of your clients, prospects, and referral sources.

Media placements help to increase your visibility, reinforce that you are the expert in your practice area, and create top-of-mind awareness among prospects and referral sources. Earned media is some of the most effective marketing you can get, but it is also the hardest to receive.

### The Elements of a Successful PR Campaign

**It All Starts with Messaging.** Any good campaign starts by first understanding your law firm's brand and establishing what you want the campaign to accomplish. What are your business goals? Who is your target audience? What messaging do you want to convey to this audience? What are your differentiators? The answers to these important questions will dictate how the entire campaign is executed.

**Get Comfortable Talking About Yourself.** Client successes, noteworthy verdicts, new practice groups – if you don't tout your own accomplishments, who will? Does your firm rely heavily on word-of-mouth to gain new clients? Then give them something to talk about! While it's important to share these stories on your website and social media, there is high value in third-party mentions that are viewed as unbiased and therefore carry more weight for prospects and clients.

When pitching a story idea to reporters, remember that not everything is newsworthy, so try to avoid wasting your



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time or the reporter's by pitching every item. Focus on those that are timely, that would interest or potentially impact the publication's readers, or that are linked to a larger story.

**Be an Expert at Positioning Yourself as an Expert.** Reporters and editors are always looking for ideas and commentary on current news and trends. To increase your visibility as a knowledgeable source, keep an eye on trends and forecasts in your practice area and develop story ideas that will grab the attention of reporters, therefore presenting the opportunity for you to be quoted.

Remember, reporters are typically overworked and under a deadline. Keep your pitches concise, emphasize why this would be of interest to their readers, and if they do ask for a quote, be quick with your response. The goal is to be "first of mind" for a journalist when they have a story that falls into your area of expertise. When the chance occurs, you will want to have a relationship built on trust and mutual respect in order to capitalize on the opportunity.

**Always Leverage and Maximize.** Going back to the original question – Does a media mention hold the same weight it once did? The answer is yes – but with a caveat. What you do to maximize the reach of your news mentions matters. If you don't leverage the article on your own channels, you've missed out on a critical marketing opportunity.

Instead of limiting the audience to only that publication's readership, find ways to promote and repurpose the news, therefore extending the life of the story. For example, post on your website, share on social media, distribute via your client newsletter, etc. Again, I emphasize, if you aren't willing to talk about yourself and your achievements, who else will?

Executing a successful PR campaign may seem simple – develop your firm's brand and key messaging; cultivate respected relationships with targeted reporters and regularly provide them with newsworthy story ideas; then create a promotional plan that will leverage valued media mentions among your firm's different marketing channels – but each one of the steps takes time and resources. Many law firms fall short simply due to lack of time. One option is to bring in an experienced PR firm that will champion for your legal professionals in the same way that you advocate for your clients, and who have an understanding of what topics will

resonate with editors and readers. Whether you handle in-house, or choose to bring in the professionals to assist, PR is a tried-and-true marketing strategy to help your firm gain the confidence of prospects and referral sources. ■

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