

## From Law to Public Relations and Marketing Communications

### Success Story: Gina Furia Rubel, Esq.

October 19, 2004

**JD Bliss (JDB):** You have an undergraduate degree in communications and now head your own public relations and marketing agency. Why did you decide to pursue a legal career in between?

**Rubel:** I come from four generations of attorneys, and my grandfather was in fact the first Italian- American U.S. Magistrate in the country's history. Our family firm, Furia & Turner, is located in Philadelphia, although I was never in any way pushed to become a lawyer. In fact, my father, Richard Furia, has always given me his full support every step of the way in my education and career. I chose my undergraduate major in part because I felt that training in communications would be great preparation to speak before a jury.

**JDB:** What was your focus in law school and your years in practice?

**Rubel:** I earned my J.D. from Widener University School of Law in 1994 and was admitted to practice in Pennsylvania – a license I continue to keep very active. During law school I clerked for the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas in the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, and for nearly two years I supervised crisis communications, risk management and international media relations – in addition to playing a major role in drafting the final decision – for the Mumia Abu-Jamal internationally publicized death penalty trial. I then spent several years as a litigator with two Philadelphia firms, serving as second chair in a number of trials and earning admission in New Jersey as well as Pennsylvania, before several federal district courts and the Supreme Court of the U.S.

**JDB:** Why and how did you move to the marketing and communications field?

**Rubel:** The Mumia Abu-Jamal trial showed me that my real love was a combination of public relations and the law. I sought experience as a lawyer because I really wanted the credibility and experience that a background in practice brings. But by 1999 I moved to the suburbs, and I was ready for a more manageable career closer to home that would give me a practical marketing background. Through networking I found a position heading communications and human relations at Vivid Technology, a video-on-demand (VOD) company. In less than a year I was very successful at generating high visibility publicity in the trade press and regional television. But Vivid was purchased by a larger company, and again through networking I found a second position close to home, one that was perhaps my most formative marketing experience.

**JDB:** What was that second marketing communications position, and why was it so important?

**Rubel:** I became head of public relations for Roska Direct, a direct marketing firm headed by Jon Roska, who's widely recognized as one of the most brilliant direct marketers in the world. When he interviewed me he asked, "Why would someone with an attorney's background want to work in direct marketing?" I can still quote verbatim my answer to him: "Lawyers communicate a targeted message to a targeted audience in order to elicit a specific response. Isn't that what direct marketers do?" We as lawyers obviously have to understand legal theory and case law, but ultimately, whether in a brief or a courtroom argument, we have to analyze our audience and come up with the most effective message – the same type of communications analysis that marketers do. That realization was my own personal epiphany of how to combine the law and marketing. Jon served as my mentor, teaching me everything I know about direct marketing, giving me the opportunity to handle public relations for a wide range of pharmaceutical and consumer product companies, and then (after I had accomplished everything we both wanted at Roska Direct) encouraging me to move on and secure wider agency experience.

**JDB:** How did you secure wider marketing and communications experience?

**Rubel:** By 2001 I knew that I wanted to focus on law firm marketing and communication. I wasn't sure whether to do it in my own agency or someone else's, but I knew I wanted a better grounding in agency practices. I was selected for account supervisor positions at two Philadelphia-area full-service agencies, and handled a wide range of very successful PR programs for corporate and non-profit clients. However, the experience showed me that I really wanted to head my own firm. I love being part of a team, but I'm an independent thinker and also wanted the flexibility to do high-end work while still having time for my children and family. So in April of 2002 I left the agency world and started consulting.

**JDB:** Had you already secured clients when you launched your own firm? How did you handle the startup process?

**Rubel:** Through my agency work I had one project immediately in hand: for a major catering and events firm I managed sponsorships, vendor participation and catering for the 2002 Dad Vail Regatta, which drew over 50,000 attendees in two days. Then I secured my second client – Roska Direct and my mentor, Jon Roska. By June 2002 I had incorporated and secured two more clients, both of which were law firms where I had built relationships. My husband provided his income stream to our family, so I could concentrate on developing the kind of high-level public relations work I wanted. I've now expanded my client list to include education, communications, non-profit and service industry clients, but my real niche is legal communications. I love working with lawyers, using my knowledge of our language and profession to help them communicate and better interact with all their publics and the community.

**JDB:** Do you find that being a licensed attorney is an advantage to your law firm PR work?

**Rubel:** Absolutely! In the first place I have a solid grasp on the ethics of legal communications that few large agencies can match. I served for six years, including three as chair, on the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board Hearing Committee, and have developed an in-depth understanding of the ABA and other Rules of Professional Conduct. This both benefits my clients and has made me a sought-after writer and speaker on ethics in marketing. I advise one of the area's largest defense firms on legal ethics, present CLE programs on the topic, and later this year will present at the law firm Chief Marketing Officers

Conference. A second advantage is that I can advise my clients and maintain the protection of attorney-client privilege in doing so. It lends me added credibility to be a lawyer and truly to care about the image and reputation of our profession.

**JDB:** It seems that being a lawyer and a law firm consultant gives you the best of both worlds.

**Rubel:** I love what I do and haven't looked back since I started my own business. I work hard at maintaining the highest level of professionalism, because when you love what you do it means by definition that you want to be good at it. There are a few issues that are a bit more sensitive for me as a practicing attorney, such as making sure there are no conflicts of interest among the clients I represent. I believe passionately in the importance of my work, and have launched a program to instill responsible professional development skills in paralegals, administrators and staff as well as lawyers. I'm still a full-fledged member of the legal profession, and know I chose the right way to make a difference in it.

Gina Furia Rubel is the principal of Furia Rubel Communications, a public relations and marketing communications firm that provides business and professional development solutions to clients by implementing integrated and proactive communications strategies through public relations, marketing, advertising and interactive tactics. Ms. Rubel can be reached at 215-340-0480 or [gina@furiarubel.com](mailto:gina@furiarubel.com).

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