



Q: Which works best -- coaching or advertising?

A: Asking whether coaching or advertising works best is comparing apples to ponies -- they have entirely different goals. Further, it's not necessarily an either/or question. With tight controls and a focused market, you might actually be able to do both, but you have to be very strategic in your decisions and goals.

Of course, there are countless statistically valid surveys over many decades that have clearly proven that advertising works, and that advertising in a recession is the best value of all.

The general problem I have with questions regarding the effectiveness of advertising is that I think most studies and statistics are worthless, because they can't make qualitative comparisons about the campaigns they purport to measure. As I usually describe it, the surveys typically measure "Which bad ads suck less." That's not a foundation upon which to build a strategy.

It's like asking whether Coaching works. It *can*. Some coaches are outstanding and achieve great results, and I've hired and recommended them regularly. Others are simply awful.

Comparing *effective* advertising to *effective* coaching, and advertising will win, because it benefits every lawyer in the entire firm simultaneously instead of just a handful, and can do so quickly. Done badly, they both waste money. Everything else sits in the middle.

Full disclosure – Fishman Marketing is a branding- and website-related agency and we offer advertising as one of our services, BUT we only recommend it in those situations where we are confident that the cost is a better expenditure than the others, including coaching. (It's why we don't take a percentage of the media buy like everyone else – we don't want the implicit conflict of making more money if the client advertises more.)

Doing *anything* great is difficult, and advertising is no different. As in every other industry, quality is a rough bell curve. Most of our profession's advertising is average to mediocre. Some is terrible. Some is outstanding. (Much of it looks like it *was* outstanding but had the effectiveness edited out during multiple marketing committee meetings.)

The great ads work great, and what I like about them is that for the right firm, at the right time, in the right market, with the right strategy, and the right campaign, advertising can significantly strengthen ALL of the firm's lawyers' business-development efforts rapidly and simultaneously. Bad campaigns are a tragic waste of valuable resources.

With that in mind, how can you realistically measure the effectiveness of advertising? The real question for me always comes back to – "Can YOUR firm do great advertising, or will your lawyers turn excellence into mediocrity?" In my opinion, a big part of the agency's job is educating a firm's lawyers about marketing and advertising to the degree that they'll be able to leave a good campaign alone. It's tough, but it must be done.