

What REALLY

Turning a Firm's Small Size into a Huge Advantage

Having more bodies to throw at a case doesn't make a firm more effective. It's not who has the most lawyers attending a hearing or deposition—it's who has the *best strategy*. But that's a tough message for small firms to drive home with corporate clients. The solution is to embrace, not avoid, your size in your marketing.



BY ROSS
FISHMAN

WHO Schopf & Weiss, a 25-lawyer commercial litigation boutique in Chicago.

BACKGROUND Schopf & Weiss is a small firm version of the powerhouse litigation firms. It handles high-end commercial litigation, focusing on significant business disputes in areas like antitrust, contract, intellectual property and RICO. This 20-year-old firm pays salaries comparable to the big firms and attracts law students with

similar high-grade academic credentials. The ones who join this firm are born litigators who reject big firm offers in favor of working in an environment where they can get more hands-on experience—and get it much earlier. Instead of spending the first five years in the library, they're an integral part of two- or three-lawyer teams, playing an active role in cases.

But when the firm is recruiting, it doesn't simply look for law review students—it looks for a very specific type of person. Someone who's thoughtful, smart and savvy. Someone both practical *and* creative. And here's why: When you're a small firm and dumping more bodies on a case isn't an option, you need clever lawyers who can find the alternative solutions. Ones who seek to handle their cases more cost-effectively. Ones who look for innovative fixes to on-the-spot problems. That's what Schopf & Weiss is all about.

It had a problem, though, in conveying this to executives and in-house lawyers at Fortune 500 companies, as well as to big firm lawyers who could refer conflict cases or co-counsel representations.

Big firms are perceived to offer a higher level of expertise than small firms, even when that's not true. Case in point: Schopf

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Bigger is Good.
Smarter is Better.sm

Sometimes bigger is better - like when it comes to sumo wrestlers, white sand beaches, and fireworks on the Fourth of July.

But bigger is not better when it comes to resolving complicated business disputes. Then, smarter is better. A smarter law firm makes its clients' goals its own and finds extraordinary ways of solving challenging problems. A smarter law firm staffs each case with a committed and driven team that knows that "good enough" never is.

If you're looking for smarter, we have good news. You've found Schopf & Weiss.

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Works

LAW FIRM MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

& Weiss, which in reality is a top-quality litigation firm. But as everyone knows, perception is a function of good marketing. Big firms may not be as efficient, and perhaps not even as skilled, but the trade-off for the client is the protection a name-brand firm offers. When a big case goes bad, people don't get fired because they hired a large well-known firm. But in-house lawyers who select a small or no-name firm put themselves on the line—and who wants that?

MARKETING GOALS What Schopf & Weiss needed was to develop brand recognition as an outstanding litigation firm that, despite its size, makes a safe choice for Fortune 500 companies.

Up to this point, however, the firm had historically had an anti-marketing attitude, believing that doing great work was enough. The firm had certainly done well, but it had, perhaps too proudly, viewed itself as the “Stealth Law Firm,” the best-kept secret in the litigation community. However, you don't get to be a safe choice if few members of your target audience have ever heard of you. And it's even harder if your limited marketing materials look mediocre (and that was a charitable description of the firm's existing Web site).

In other words, this was a first-rate firm with third-rate marketing—which simply would not do because when you're a small firm, your credibility is always a question in the marketplace. The little things matter, so you have to convey that you do them perfectly. You can't afford the slightest hint that you're not first-class.

To meet this challenge, we needed a clear way to convey that Schopf & Weiss's size and style allows it to offer better strategy than the big firms—a clever, concise

way to help the lawyers summarize their distinction in their marketing materials and in face-to-face situations. Then we hit on it: This firm's size is its distinction. The firm's small. *It is.* And you can't run away from who you are, or deny the obvious. You either apologize for your size or you embrace it, turning it to your advantage.

IMPLEMENTATION We decided to focus on how a small, efficient firm like this one can get results similar to the big firms, but faster and more cost-effectively. That the lawyers can be more creative and nimble. And they can get closer to their clients—and make clients' goals their own—because there aren't layers of lawyers between them and the client. They can find the smarter solutions to resolve their clients' business disputes. This is what separates Schopf & Weiss from the big firms.

To convey this brand message, we conceived the tag line, “*Bigger is good. Smarter is better.*” Then we developed a series of attention-grabbing visuals to illustrate it with comparative images of similar objects, where the larger object is not the better choice. Where bigger means slower, more cumbersome, less sophisticated or less nimble. A big old boxy TV versus a flat screen. A grandfather clock versus a PDA. A big boom-box versus an iPod.

We rebuilt the firm's Web site around the “bigger versus smarter” tag line and imagery. Then we designed a brochure system to go along with it, including

Schopf & Weiss LLP
Business Litigation

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Before and after. If you're smaller, you can't afford a bland logo (above). You need to show style and sophistication (below).

a preprinted firm brochure, as well as individual inserts and a pocket folder to give the materials more flexibility in tailoring to particular situations. We used phrasing like, “Sometimes bigger is better. A tax refund, bandwidth, a sandy beach . . . But bigger isn't always better . . . and to resolve most disputes, our size is the right size.”

In addition, we redesigned the firm's dull '70s-vintage logo, giving it a fresh, modern look and picking up the strong green color the firm had selected as the accent for its brand-new office space.

RESULTS The firm has rallied around its unique message. Six simple words have captured the essence of the firm and the value it brings to its clients. The lawyers always felt they were different, but now they have a credible way to express it to clients and prospects—through a brand that showcases the firm as the high-quality institution that it is. **LP**

Ross Fishman (www.fishmanmarketing.com) specializes in marketing training and creating differentiation programs for law firms worldwide. A Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management, he is an inaugural member of the Legal Marketing Association's Hall of Fame.