

OGLETREE DEAKINS GETS IT RIGHT

DOING THE PERFECT AD

At last, the perfect law firm ad campaign. Well, pretty much perfect. The 39-office, Atlanta-based law firm has been running an ad campaign that embodies every principle of good advertising.

The latest ad in the Wall Street Journal has a picture of a man in front of a crossroad sign as if he were choosing which fork to take. The headline which is really a callout in the middle of the copy, is in larger type than the rest of the text, which says “*where you go now*” (lower case as is).

The text says. *"As companies look to the future, the need for service-focused labor and employment law firm with national breadth and local presence has never been more critical. That's why Ogletree Deakins helps you determine the best path to reach your future destination. where you go now (the nominal headline), and the best path to reach that destination. One of the nation's largest and most respected labor and employment law firms, Ogletree Deakins has 39 locations and serves half the Fortune 50. Learn more at www.OgletreeDeakins.com."*

Then the subhead “*Ogletree Deakins. NOW*”

Considering the squalid state of most professional service advertising, this is the best because...

- The illustration is not frivolous, but specifically relates to the message, which illustrations and headlines often do not.

- The text reflects the message delineated from both the illustration and the modest headlines.
- It breaks from tradition by not having a standard headline, but uses instead a breakout of headline size text. A clear demonstration that in all advertising, breaking traditional rules can be effective, if done imaginatively
- It addresses a single practice – labor law—rather than trying to sell the whole firm, which benefits equally well in this context
- The ad states the problem faced by its market clearly, before it talks of the solution and the firm’s ability to solve the problem
- It sums up the firm’s ability to help in one sentence, followed by a description of the firm in the next, followed by the “*39 locations and half the Fortune 50*”.
- The ad is not only credible, it makes its point without self-serving boasts.
- It is beautifully written, spare, doesn’t shout, and best of all, uses the word ”you”, not “we”.

According to the Ogletree marketing department, the ad was created by a former ad agency with guidance and input for the firm's Client Services Committee. The objective, they say, was to let readers know that they have a knowledgeable, reliable partner for any labor and employment issue a business may face. They have a deep and diverse marketing program that centers on client service, experience, and on actively providing practical legal knowledge on any labor and employment law topic. The program supports the claims of the ad, and includes client assessment surveys, seminar and events, e-alerts, webinars, public relations, and speaking and presenting opportunities. They run advertisements on a regular basis, targeting business news outlets, respective trade publications, as well as diversity publications.

All in all, a fine piece of work.

In the larger context of advertising, Ogletree’s committed program seems to recognize that the purpose of law firm advertising, as opposed to product advertising, is to build name

recognition and reputation, which cannot be done effectively with infrequent ads. The problem with most law and accounting firm advertising is that it tries to create clients with its ads, which it rarely does. Who hires a lawyer or accountant from an ad?

In fact, there is an unpleasant little secret. If you ran a series of ads that simply said, “*Smith & Dale is a law firm*”, and ran it often enough, people would know your name. But you would be competing against firms with ads like the Ogletree Deakens ad, which goes beyond name recognition to project a capability and a quality sufficient to bring the firm to mind when people are choosing a firm for your specific needs, skills, and experience. But the Ogletree ad so focused on the reader and the skills that it can stand up to any other competitive ad.

Another case in point that illustrates the worst kind of advertising is another Wall Street Journal ad by Marcum – an accounting firm. There is no illustration, but the headline reads “*Discover the Marcum Difference.*” In a grey box beneath the headline is a list of the purported firm virtues...*Integrity, Value, Discipline Excellence, Client Service, and Experience* (repeated a second time, with an asterisk that says *It’s that important to us*). Below, on a white background, and the words, “*At Marcum, we’ve been putting our experience to work for more than 55 years. Our skilled professionals....etc.*”

This is drivel. If there is some other objective in the ad other than marketing, it doesn’t come clear. The virtues they list are part of every CPA firm’s practice – if not, they quickly lose clients, if not their license. Are they implying that other CPA firms don’t have integrity, value, client services, and so forth? Ridiculous. And it’s all “*we*”. You don’t get to the “*you*” until the very last sentence in the ad – if anybody reads that far. Furthermore, it doesn’t trust the reader to recognize those virtues. It doesn’t delineate what the firm actually does and how it does it, nor does it in any way demonstrate the difference that the headline promises. And worst of all, it tries to tell the reader what to think, instead of demonstrating it to lead the reader to his or her own conclusions in favor of the advertiser. I call this egocentric advertising, because it tends to make the advertiser more comfortable about the ad and the firm than it does the reader.

There is a web site listed at the bottom of the ad, but no reason in the ad to go there. Too bad. The site is pretty good, although even at the site, there’s too much “*we*” and not enough “*you*”.

Now, if this is the only ad they run, it may impress their current clients, but not likely anybody else. If it runs only once or twice, even the name will be forgotten very quickly.

What, then, is the purpose of law and accounting firm advertising? To build a reputation and name recognition that reinforces other marketing efforts to attract and sell clients. This is a hard lesson for product advertising people to understand, which is why most professional services advertising is so bad. Few people read an ad by a law or accounting firm and call up to say, "I saw your ad – let's start Monday" advertising builds an impression of the firm (which is why attempts to be funny are silly), name recognition, and reputation – so that somebody who eventually needs a firm will tend to choose that of the better known advertiser rather than to the competitors. If, like the Ogletree ad, it addresses a specific problem or specialization, it is likely to get inquiries. Ultimately, it can be a significant element of a total marketing program – without which it's doing only a fraction of the marketing job.

It should not be forgotten that professional services are probably the only enterprises that depend upon the full participation of the professionals themselves for their marketing efforts. Product marketing doesn't involve the people who make the product. Who hires a lawyer or an accountant without actually meeting the practitioner? In other words, ads alone don't do the job. A total marketing program -- including selling – does.

Will advertising distinguish one firm from another? Not likely, unless, like Ogletree, it's advertising a specialty. Nor, I think, is it necessary. Just projecting a firm's capability effectively will make it more competitive, and that's enough. There are too many law and accounting firms who do essentially the same things to make it necessary to go beyond that.

Unfortunately, advertising is much more complex than it looks. It is the most subtle of all marketing tools, and the most frustrating. It can even succeed by breaking traditional advertising rules, if that's done properly. Judging from the full body of professional services advertising, even most ad agencies don't seem to understand the differences between selling a law or accounting firm and selling toothpaste.

The people who did the Ogletree campaign are rare.

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