

From the Great Jakes Blog

Should firms help brand individual attorneys?



By Robert Algeri, Founder
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I was recently speaking with the CMO of a large and prestigious law firm, when he did something unexpected: he apologized for his website. It wasn't an ugly website. Rather, he apologized because the website had been conceived as "nothing more than a brochure to help brand the firm."

"We've come to the realization that our site needs to do more to help individual attorneys market themselves," the CMO told me.

"Yes!" I enthusiastically replied. That's exactly what needs to be done. However, I was surprised to hear him say it because, as I see it, the legal marketing world is *just beginning* to warm to this idea. So, I'm writing this blog post in an effort to bring everybody else around.



Why not focus on the firm?

First, let me say that I think that firm-wide branding should be an objective of every law firm website. *However, it can't be the only goal.* In today's market, it's also vital to give attorneys and practice areas the tools to market and brand themselves. Why? As I see it, there are two primary reasons.

1. *Firm-wide branding is very difficult.*

Branding works best when the focus is narrow. Law firms tend to be very broad — often with hundreds of attorneys, dozens of practice areas, and offices scattered around the globe. Trying to create a brand that meaningfully applies to all of those different elements is a very long and difficult process.

2. *A law firm is the sum of its parts.*

Good law firm brands (think Cravath, Bois Schiller) are built on the reputations of their individual attorneys and practice areas. Brand building is a slow process of promoting the skills and experience of the individual parts that make up the firm. Any effort to superimpose a “brand” on a faceless group of attorneys will probably show little, if any, return.

How can your website help attorneys?

Your firm’s website should aim to be more than just a firm-wide branding device. It needs to become a platform that individual attorneys and practice areas can use to make the case for why potential clients should hire them.

This means that the firm’s website needs to be flexible enough to allow attorneys and practice areas to promote themselves in a way that makes sense for their particular markets. For example, one group might need to write articles, another attorney might want to use video content, and a third might want to use podcasts or photos. Most traditional firm-focused websites are too rigid to accommodate different messages and oddball content.

Should firm-wide branding efforts be abandoned?

Absolutely not. Firm-wide branding should always be part of the marketing mix. However, any law firm brand initiative needs to substantiate the firm’s brand claim through the work of its individual attorneys and practice areas. Anything short of this simply won’t ring true.