

How Law Firms Can Generate Awareness, Goodwill and New Clients by Affiliating with Worthwhile Endeavors

By Les Altenberg

In this day and age of search engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, blogs and social media, one of the most underused and unappreciated marketing tools available to law firms is cause marketing – those efforts in which the law firm affiliates itself with a worthwhile cause, event or other type of endeavor.

There are several reasons for doing so. First, affiliating with a cause or special event can generate enormous levels of visibility. It allows law practices to effectively target a designated group of prospects and facilitates interface between firm attorneys and prospective clients. It can so serve as a terrific means for building a database. And it certainly need not be necessarily costly.

But the most important reason for developing and implementing a cause marketing initiative is to underscore the branding of the firm. By affiliating with worthwhile causes, the firm promotes goodwill and does so in manner which work towards firm's marketing objectives, but which does not smack of hard salesmanship. As such, cause marketing can serve to elevate the firm's overall credibility in the eyes of the community and amongst its prospect groups.

Just One Example

To illustrate the above, it is useful to explore how law firms have used efforts to further their own goals. Our agency was approached once by a relatively well-known Philadelphia law firm concerned about the lack of consistent growth in its South Jersey satellite office. Firm partners felt that the major reason for this was that the community was not aware of the satellite office's existence.

As with most marketing challenges, budget allocations to address these concerns were limited, ruling out traditional advertising and PR efforts. Instead, the agency recommended creating an ongoing campaign around an event which would a) generate awareness b) underscore the firm's tagline of "Practicing the Art of Law," and c) create goodwill between the firm and the community.

The approach ultimately selected and implemented was a student art show in which third through eighth graders throughout the area were invited to submit original artwork that addressed the question, "What's great about South Jersey?" The winning entry for each grade received a savings bond for themselves as well as a cash prize for his or her school.

Over 300 entries were submitted, the competition which culminated in an art show at the satellite offices, received substantial pre and post event publicity. The firm actually

garnered four new clients on the day the winners were announced and the long-term effect was to begin the process of integrating the satellite office into the community.

The success of the program prompted the firm to continue the contest in subsequent years using themes like, *“If I Were President?”* and *“Goin’ Green: South Jersey and the Environment”*.

Why did it work?

Because from the very get-go, awareness was generated not just from the press releases and on-line announcements, but through the very act of disseminating flyers promoting the event to the schools. Thousands of schoolchildren came home with a registration form in hand, each with the firm name and logo prominently highlighted. Further, hundreds of adults (i.e., potential prospects) were further exposed to the firm when they came to review the work of the finalists and attend the ceremony announcing the winners. Finally, the financial awards themselves were presented to each winner in separate ceremonies at their respective schools. And, of course, releases on all such presentations were sent to the media, extending the life of the campaign that much further.

Getting Creative

The point of the above is not to suggest that every firm go out and implement an art show/contest, but rather to recommend that law practices get creative in developing programs that dovetail with what they’re all about. For example, our agency worked with one PI firm (that was unable to compete on TV with more financially well-heeled competitors), to create a campaign directed toward high school juniors and seniors, encouraging them not to text while driving. Again, the promotional elements were multi-faceted, and costs were considerably lower than what a full-blown advertising campaign might have entailed. The high cost of marketing can frequently be offset through creativity and by looking for alternative means to communicate what the firm is all about. The result of such creativity often results in a win-win situation for everyone involved – the community and the firm itself.

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