

MARKETING/RECRUITING

Think “tap water” re law student recruiting.

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According to a confidential McKinsey & Co. report, recruiting is among the most critical issues ahead for larger law firms. But, historically, many firms have treated their recruiting efforts as an annoyance, investing more creative energy into the annual golf outing than into finding the firm’s future leaders. Even in recessionary times, there’s a seller’s market for the top legal talent—the hottest students from the leading schools will always be in demand. With 2000’s outrageous

salary escalation, firms can’t afford to have second-tier students at first-tier prices.

There’s no more “good enough” in recruiting. In tough times, you must ensure that the best resumes possible come across your desk. The good news is that most firms’ recruiting efforts can be improved—often dramatically—with a fresh perspective and a little creativity. Instead, what have larger firms typically done? They double-check the figures on their NALP (National

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Association for Law Placement) forms, paste the firm’s standard brochure language onto the back and file the firm’s glossy brochure in each target school’s Placement Office, hoping the top candidates sign up for on-campus interviews.

Recruiting Brochures

Here’s what most firms’ recruiting brochures and NALP forms tell students:

Our firm is very old. We were founded by two lawyers who left a big firm because they wanted to create a new kind of law firm, one that treated clients well. We don’t over-staff our matters like other firms. We have the highest ethical standards and are really dedicated to client service. Our firm is committed to diversity and pro bono—we believe lawyers should give back to the community. Although we pay top dollar, our kinder, gentler lawyers enjoy a balanced quality of life, flexible work schedule, and superior training. We value our collegial environment; there are no jerks here. This is an exciting, fun place to start your career off right. If you join us, you will succeed—and wear casual clothing every day.

We represent everyone, from individuals to Fortune 500 companies, in virtually every practice area from ADR to Zoning. We are the nation’s leading experts in every single one of them, as shown over the next 24 pages, which contain alphabetical descriptions of each practice. Notice the photos of our tall building, a busy conference room and a smiling young lawyer being tenderly mentored by a gray-haired senior partner.’

Then this sound-alike brochure is slapped onto the firm Web site under “Recruiting” or “Summer Program.”

Victory is declared. We wait for a torrent of resumes to pour in.

The Short List

The students experience your firms’ identities through these promotional materials. It’s one way they decide with whom to interview on campus. Would these materials persuade you? Conversations with dozens of first- and second-year students have persuaded me that most cannot name more than three to five law firms unaided—typically Skadden Arps and the largest few firms in whatever city they attend law school. Most of this information is obtained through the school grapevine, the on-campus rumor mill created by the students who worked there the preceding summer. Would it help your firm’s recruiting efforts to be on that short list at the top schools? *That’s not accomplished through recruiting—that’s just good, solid marketing.* Historically, law firms did not work particularly hard at helping law students remember their name and understand their unique essence. But that’s changing.

The Recruiting Process

Most recruiting personnel were not hired for this type of marketing savvy. Their expertise is equally valuable—but markedly different from that of most marketers. Handling complex recruiting programs, they must be organized and detail- and people-oriented. They need strong communication skills and the ability to form relationships quickly. While acting as the external face of the firm, they manage enormous organizational chal-

lenges—sorting through resumes, culling the candidates, arranging interviews, handling the logistics of bringing in candidates from around the nation or the world and arranging the hour-by-hour scheduling of busy lawyers. They ensure that the right questions are asked, the improper ones avoided, and the evaluations are tabulated and circulated. The process ensures that the dozens of right candidates get the offers and the hundreds of wrong ones are politely and respectfully weeded out. It's an arduous, thankless task.

The Marketing Process

The recruiters' resumes do not speak to out-of-the-box creativity or marketing savvy. That is our world. It is where we as marketers can add value to the larger recruiting process.

They know the target audience. We know marketing.

Marketing is getting the target audience interested in your firm. It can help repair any misperceptions and strengthen your perceived weaknesses. For example, Skadden Arps has a pervasive but somewhat daunting reputation among law students. To address this issue, its extraordinary recruiting brochure humanizes its lawyers by gathering them under cute and clever topic headings. In the "Peter, Paul and Mary" photograph, Skadden lawyers with those first names are grouped behind a 60s-style stand-up microphone, and includes brief bio's. Other collections include the Brady Bunch, U.S. Presidents, and the entire cast of Seinfeld. The strategically light-hearted brochure softens the firm's external reputation.

Skilled marketing will cause students to visit your Web site among the thousands that exist. It can persuade students to attend your informational meetings, seek out your brochure in their schools' Placement Offices, and ask their friends and professors about the firm.

Successful marketing predisposes students to think positive thoughts about your firm, to check your firm's box when your firm visits campus, and eagerly anticipate the interview. Traditional recruiting is the critical tail end of the process. It's the "close" in the sales cycle, the face-to-face, in-person activities that persuade candidates to select

your firm from those they are interested in interviewing. Marketing can drag more, and better quality, resumes into this process. It can interest the right students, that is, the students you want in your firm.

Getting It Right

Two firms that combine marketing and recruiting successfully are Fenwick & West and Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe. These are two of the nation's best-run, best-led and most strategic firms. Not surprisingly, they also have two of the top CMOs, Diane Hamlin and Norm Rubenstein, respectively. Their two CMO's understood the critical nature of recruiting in the firm's future. They were also too busy with their full-time jobs to do much about it. Diane Hamlin details her case study elsewhere in this white paper.

CASE STUDY: Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe

Orrick had a different challenge. It is a leading firm in San Francisco (its historic base) that had grown to a 600-lawyer bicoastal giant, with more lawyers in New York than San Francisco. It also had eight smaller offices that wanted recruiting



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support with their individual markets. Orrick was competing for the top candidates at the top schools, against firms with longer-term New York or home-town reputations. It also sought to show that it practiced sophisticated law, had a technological orientation and a progressive culture.

The Challenges

What were the challenges Orrick faced? A cynical law student audience that can't be "sold." We knew that simply *telling* them how great this firm was would ring as hollow as the hundreds of other firms claiming similar ground—without supporting evidence.

The Strategy

We designed an anti-marketing campaign. We began with a brochure entitled "No Spin" that did not make a single claim. No adjectives. We did not make a single claim without a citation to a recent and credible media source. Every alleged fact or adjective was footnoted to sources ranging from *The American Lawyer* to *vault.com*. No hollow claims of expertise, quality of life, or balanced culture without a direct cite to *The National Law Journal*. For jaded law students who were being trained to find holes in every argument, we didn't give them any. Just facts from irrefutable sources.

And it was developed by the firm's existing design firm, Greenfield/Belser, to match the firm's new advertising and branding campaign (using the dominant Orrick "O"). The students loved it. Short, simple, eye-catching, it doesn't look like any brochure they've ever seen. And it doesn't read like it either.

Catch the Excitement

Then, instead of simply declaring that the firm was fun and technology-oriented, we proved it. We designed a Shockwave *computer game* entitled "Catch a Break." Built around the firm's message points, each difficulty level is a different positive message about the firm, from balanced work/life to diversity and compensation. Each level displaying a media quotation, complementing the brochure. Players select which of the firm's ten offices they would like to play from. In each city, moving the mouse underneath catches falling O-shaped, city-themed objects. In New York, King

Kong hangs from the Empire State Building, as big apples fall to be caught on a cloud. In Seattle, curled fish are caught in newspaper at the Pike Street Market. Round maki rolls land on wooden trays at a Tokyo sushi bar. Juliet tosses round roses from her balcony in London's Globe Theater. The objects fall faster as the difficulty level increases, and it becomes a quick-reflex game. After three misses, law students may register their score and receive Orrick logo gear.

With direct mail postcards, *vault.com* banner ads, and student-directed advertising, additional traffic heads to the Web site to play the game. The result? Significantly more visits to *www.orrick.com* by people with .edu email addresses. Higher on-campus name recognition at target schools. A buzz on campuses where it didn't previously exist. And an additional publicity bump from articles detailing the innovative recruiting efforts.

What Can You Do?

While ideas and plans will vary from firm to firm based on reputation, size, practice areas, geography and goals, some suggestions are common to all recruiting efforts. To begin, conduct proprietary research among target law students to identify the extent and nature of the firm's name recognition. That research will form the basis of an aggressive marketing plan. One firm with an enormous reputation in the legal profession claimed that they enjoyed similar name recognition among law students. Research showed that law students had never heard of them.

- Next, make recruiting a firm-wide priority. Improve your on-campus interviewing. Use the strategy every college fraternity employs during rush: put your most charming people on the front lines—even if they're too busy—and get them some personal training in communications or interviewing skills.

Students perceive the interviewers as representative of the firm, and one sour or bored interviewer will destroy any chance the firm would have had with that day's candidates. One top firm has had a "socially unskilled" partner in charge of their program in recent years ("Hey, it's his turn, no one

else would do it”), yet can’t understand why their acceptance offers are way down.

- Design a brochure that resonates with this audience. When you’ve finished writing it, cut out two-thirds of the words and triple the graphic images. Then cut the whole thing in half. Then, if your high-school-aged child can’t read it cover to cover without starting to doze or skim, pitch it and start from scratch.
- Use advertising to ensure that they remember your name. New publications are springing up with the law student market in mind. Think advertising doesn’t work for a sophisticated audience? Then why does half your office spend three dollars for a bottle of water that comes free out of the tap? Advertising works, it’s only bad advertising that fails. Make sure that yours jumps off the page with a bold message and eye-catching visuals. Forget the clichéd collections of smiling summer associates. Law students know they can’t afford to not look chipper upon command.
- Use public relations to help convey your message. Advertising can broaden a firm’s name recognition quickly, but it adds credibility to have students reading positive articles about your firm.
- Use the Internet. Law students are voracious Web users. Make sure you have a positive presence on www.vault.com, www.infirmation.com, www.greedyassociates.com and the other sites targeted toward law students.
- Bring your summer and first-year associates into the efforts. Find out what reputation your firm has on campus (if any) and what firms are doing to attract their attention. Use them as quick-and-dirty focus groups.
- Develop closer relationships with the placement office personnel at your target schools. They can be remarkably influential with students who are trying to determine which offer to accept. Ensure that they know your firm’s strengths. The list of creative marketing possibilities is endless. Treat this like it’s critical to your firm’s survival.

Because it is.

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