

LAW PRACTICE **Front** LINES

INTELLIGENCE, INSIGHTS & TACTICS FOR YOUR LAW PRACTICE

MARKETING MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY FINANCE



WHAT REALLY WORKS?

What works? Too many firms rely on safe, bland marketing—and wonder why it fails. Boring marketing takes forever to gain traction. Wildly innovative messages, visuals and activities get attention more quickly, at a much lower cost. Of course, it's also harder to persuade lawyers to try those things. What happens when a firm does break out and tries something new?

Turn the page for our new column, What Really Works, and get the story behind Shefsky & Froelich's full-service identity makeover.

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What REALLY

Identity Update for a Full-Service Firm

You can't differentiate full-service, midsize law firms. They all look alike. They all do the same thing, the same way. Heck, half of their lawyers used to work for competitors, so all their marketing gets muddled into the middle. Unless . . .



BY ROSS
FISHMAN

Shefsky & Froelich: Putting Imagination to Work

WHO Shefsky & Froelich, a 75-lawyer full-service Chicago firm.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE Shefsky & Froelich historically had a reputation as a business-oriented firm representing small, entrepreneurial clients. In recent years, though, the firm had gone upscale in its client base and its senior partners. The percentage of large, institutional clients had increased sig-

nificantly and an impressive group of new senior partners had enhanced the firm's practice and reputation. The clients were now larger, more-sophisticated companies.

The firm's charismatic founders had developed great individual relationships and so hadn't invested in marketing the general firm. More recent rainmakers were individually renowned and so the marketplace was not aware of the firm's current composition. The firm was not well-known, and those who knew of it had a decade-old view. It was losing work to less-skilled but better-known firms. Good clients were telling the lawyers that they couldn't hire them for larger matters because the firm wasn't high-profile enough.

S&F needed to do something that would cause the marketplace to view it differently, to leverage its historically creative reputation, but in a way that moved the firm up a tier in perception. We needed to give the firm a new identity, a new message, and a visual treatment that supported it.

The challenge with full-service firms is how to distinguish them from the countless other seemingly skilled, look-alike firms. "We're smart" isn't differentiating. Neither are claims that the firm



Two different images are used to convey the essence of S&F's "Imagination" message—an unusual photo of a man walking into the clouds and an elated man jumping for joy (page 7). Other joyful images are used to reflect the diversity of the target audience. An "Imagination page" at www.imaginationlaw.com describes S&F's unique philosophy.

Works

LAW FIRM MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

is skilled, service- or client-oriented, dedicated, ethical, excellent or any of the countless generic platitudes firms mumble when they have nothing to say. How often do we hear clients plead, “Gosh, if *only* I could find an ethical, dedicated law firm”? Not very.

We needed something strong, fresh and unique. And with a limited budget, we needed to do it boldly enough that people would quickly take notice. This meant a complete image overhaul, from logo to Web site to brochure. Boring marketing takes forever to gain traction. Wildly innovative messages, visuals and activities get attention more quickly, at a much lower cost. Of course, it's also harder to persuade the lawyers to try those things.

MARKETING GOAL The audience was both internal and external. We needed to show the lawyers how they were unique and also explain it to prospects. Volvos are *safe*. Baker & McKenzie is *global*. My wife is *fun*. What word could this firm stand for?

RESEARCH AND PLANNING We interviewed nearly the entire firm, listening for themes. We gleaned that S&F lawyers have a unique focus on finding nontraditional solutions to clients' problems.

They'd always been this way. Cid Froelich recalls the early days—with few clients but plenty of time—sitting around thinking up brand-new solutions to tough problems. After they developed a solution to some interesting problem, they'd figure out who they knew who had that problem, then call and tell them what they'd discovered, and often get hired. Clever.

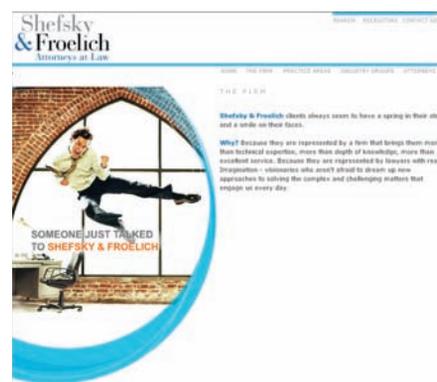
IMPLEMENTATION One word that came up repeatedly during the interviews was “imagination.” It's how S&F lawyers develop new solutions to tough problems. Imagination is a strong word. It says “creativity” in a more interesting way, and it was a word we could own.

DIFFERENTIATION We trashed the original skyline-burdened Web site and created ImaginationLaw.com. Bell-bottoms were in style when their logo was designed, so it needed to be refreshed, and we conceived “Imagination at Work” as the tagline. Just before we launched, General Electric began using it! There was no real risk of confusion, but marketing partner Allan Slagel still preferred to use our second choice, “Putting Imagination to Work.”

RESULTS It gave them a message to go to market with. There's a new spring in the lawyers' steps, and the firm is growing and attracting more top lawyers and clients. Administrator Georganne Binnie was integral to the re-branding and talks with pride about how the cool new image has improved the firm's recruiting, too.

Clients love it, and other Chicago firms admit to borrowing the Web site design. It differentiates the firm in head-to-head competitions and helped bring in a multimillion-dollar case in a national RFP. This marketing thing—it just might catch on. **LP**

Ross Fishman (www.rossfishman.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.



What Do We Do? Ideas You Can Use

Conceiving a unique message is hard. Executing it creatively is even harder. Convincing lawyers to let you launch it is the hardest part. Long ago, I'd storm into a lawyer's office with an idea that was guaranteed to make the firm rich and famous. And they'd recoil in horror. It was so obviously a brilliant idea, why didn't they see that? Why do law marketers routinely complain that their lawyers get in the way?

Here's what I've learned. Lawyers are smart, but most haven't had marketing classes. So if you want to try something new, educate them first, before showing them the idea. Springing powerful new ideas on a lawyer is the easiest way to hear “no.” (They were expecting gavels and globes and you showed them ... this?)

Teach the difference between good and bad, between safe and effective, between dull and powerful. Help them see what catches the eye and what doesn't. And *then* show examples of the extraordinary marketing used by high-end firms. Once you have prepared them to accept great work, make your recommendations. *That's* what works.

The safe answer is always “no.” The harder answer is, “Okay, let's try it.” If a brilliant idea is rejected by smart people, it wasn't sold effectively. — Ross Fishman